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September 29, 2020

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“The Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head” (Luke 9:59).

Job 9:1-12; Luke 9:57-62

The Church celebrates St. Jerome today, a fourth century priest and scholar who is remembered mainly for his translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin. His long and controversial life is well presented in the Wikipedia article online, along with art depicting him as an ascetic living in a cave. His work as a translator reminds us of the challenge all of us face in translating the Word into our own lives, making it incarnate and relevant to our own time and experience.

Today’s Gospel provides three examples of people who asked Jesus if they could follow him. One he dissuades by telling him that the Son of Man has no permanent place in this world, “nowhere to rest his head.” Another wants to go bury his father first, to whom Jesus says, “Let the dead bury the dead,” a detachment from all loyalties except to follow him. Finally, a man asks to say goodbye to his family, and Jesus tells him that anyone who puts his hand to the plow but looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”

These extreme conditions are possibly literary hyperbole, but we know from other passages how radical the call to follow Jesus was. It cannot be half a measure or indecisive if it is to succeed. Like a good translation, the meaning of the Gospel has to be carried over into our lives without ambiguity or distortion. The Word must become flesh in us if it is to express Jesus through the circumstances and choices we live out as his disciples in our culture and time.

In 2012, then Pope Benedict said on World Migration Day that Jesus was a refugee, a theme Pope Francis has returned to often, advocating support for the estimated 63 million people waiting in refugee camps for resettlement or return to their homes. To welcome them is to welcome Jesus. To reject or ignore their plight is to reject God's presence in the world.

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