Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart” (Ps 90:12).

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 9:13-18b; Ps 90; Phmn 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33

Planning ahead means knowing that you have all the resources you will need to finish a project. On this Labor Day weekend, we honor those who work, and we praise those who choose well and prepare for careers they love and can commit to. We also ask society and our economy to provide both the means and the respect all workers need to live full, satisfying lives.

What is true of all laborers is also true for those who seek the radical path of imitating Christ. Jesus asks those who want to be disciples to know what it entails and to be prepared to follow through. We know our inadequacy but trust that everything we need will be given to us when we need it. The builder who runs out of money to finish a tower, or the king who marches badly outnumbered against a rival, will both be accounted fools. Know what you are getting into. Trust the one you are following to provide for you along the way.

Jesus expresses this call by telling potential disciples they must place their commitment to living the Gospel ahead of all other concerns, even natural loyalty to family, tribe and nation. Even love of family and the call to duty must come after the inner call to radical selfhood we discern as our true vocation.

The idea of “carrying your cross” was seen as putting put your shoulders under your own life, your “tau,” the T shape of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This meant to be responsible for finding your authentic self. No other path is as difficult but also as fulfilling as being obedient to this unique vocation. Yet, how many people never take up the challenge? After Jesus’ death, the physical cross became a special sign of suffering, but its broader meaning is the same. Carry the weight of your own life to completion and you will fulfill God’s will.

Wisdom of heart also includes knowing how limited our time is on earth. Don’t postpone conversion or miss an invitation to go deeper, for the chance may not come around again soon. How many people procrastinate and then live to regret a lost opportunity! The lesson is built into our language: Timing is everything, strike while the iron is hot, seize the moment, for he who hesitates is lost.

Discipleship is a course in time management. God is always fresh in the moment, so a disciple learns to go with the flow. Pay attention; go here; go there. But also, wait for ripeness; when in doubt, pray for insight and courage; prudence plans ahead, but then acts. Even if you stumble, stumble forward, and always keep your eyes on the prize.

Jesus ends his teaching with this: "Renounce all your possessions or you cannot be my disciple." Let go of anything that hinders you from following me. Travel light, for nothing is worth more than being with Jesus.

To celebrate the community Eucharist is to be reminded of this most important of all gifts —companionship with Jesus and his followers. The bread we break and the cup we share unites us to be Christ in the world. There is no other life as precious as this, for it blesses us here and now and promises us a share in the life to come.

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