**23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle C, 2013**

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

September 7/8, 2013

We have some strong words today in the Gospel, words like “hate” and “renounce.” Difficult words spoken by Jesus such as “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple,” and “anyone who does not renounce all of his possessions cannot be my disciple.”

Hating one’s parents, wife and children? Really? How can this be? Is this not contrary to the Gospel of Life and Love, the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Well, no, not really.

I had to research this a bit when I first read it. I looked up the meanings of the Greek words that this Gospel was first written in. I found out that, yes, the Greek word we translate as “hate” meant exactly that: hate. I discovered that “renounce” in Greek literally means “say goodbye to something; to say farewell to the old and hello to the new.” I also found out that it was typical for Jesus’ culture 2000 years ago to use such words not for their literal sense but to emphasize the point that followed.

So, Jesus is emphasizing that we must be completely dedicated to him. He is saying we must, ***someday***, say farewell to the old life and hello to the new; we must say good bye to all our possessions and completely give our lives to God if we are to be with him in heaven.

Yes, Jesus is telling us what the conditions of discipleship are. He is saying that to be his disciples, we must before anything else follow the First Commandment, “You shall have no strange gods before me.” He is telling us that to be his disciples, we must acknowledge God as God, as the one and only God in our lives, and he is warning us that if we are too attached to our possessions or even to our own lives, we run the risk of making our possessions, or even other people, *false gods*, i.e., things and people we put before God himself.

Jesus is also saying to us, by his strong words of emphasis, that if we are to be his followers, we cannot be lukewarm in our response to his love and his commandments. He is telling us that we must be whole-hearted, in other words, we have to make a ***conscious choice*** in our lives either for him or against him.

Jesus asks us (as is so clearly described in today’s Gospel) to step back and consider the cost of discipleship. He asks us to calculate the risks involved, to be prudent in other words, and then to decide, to choose and to act. He is talking about ***conversion*** a word we hear a lot during Lent and a little during Ordinary time. He tells us that there comes a time in everyone’s life when we have to decide for or against living our faith.

God is truly amazing in this way. He never forces us, does He? He doesn’t want to do that. He wants ***us***to decide, to make a free choice, to respond in freedom, to make a serious commitment that in the end will cost us everything, but give us so much more in return. Like any vocation, we must freely agree. It must be a free choice. If we are coerced, there is no real response. I recently was taking care of my nine month old granddaughter. I wanted to change her clothing. It was an act of love, right? What did she do as I was trying to make her life happier? She squirmed and tried valiantly to twist and turn her body away from me and onto her stomach, making it nearly impossible for me to change her. She resisted. I thought to myself, “Isn’t this a lot like we often are when God wants to clean us up, correct us, show us a better way, and love us? Isn’t it just like us to squirm, resist and turn away?”

God will never force us to comply if we twist away from him, if we twist our minds away from the Truth and toward the Evil One who is a lie.

This call to change, to conversion, to “metanoia” as we sometimes hear, is something each of us have faced or will face some time during our lives. For some of us it will be early in life; for others mid-life; for others in older age; for a few in their last moments before death. But that moment of decision always comes, and the question is always the same: *“Will you love me more than you love your possessions, more than you love any other person whom I have given you, and more than your own earthly life? Will you be willing to let it all go so you can be with* me *forever?”*

All of this defies human wisdom in a way, doesn’t it? But it is God’s wisdom at work here. It is God’s counsel, like we heard in our first Reading today. It is God’s wisdom, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who is always active in our lives.

Let us listen, and respond….