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23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - 4 September 2022

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4 September 2022

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Following Christ is a pathway to blessing, healing, fulfilment and joy. However, the way of Christ is not always easy to discern. God's ways are infinitely above ours. The only sure way to follow rightly is through complete dedication, by putting Jesus first. In our Church, September is also celebrated as the season of creation until the feast of St Francis of Assisi, 4 October. He is the patron saint of ecology and the patron of Pope Francis.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are our refuge and our strength.
Lord, have mercy.

You are the rock of our salvation.
Christ, have mercy.

You are the wisdom of the Father.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

The oration

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption,
look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters,
that those who believe in Christ
may receive true freedom
and an everlasting inheritance.

Originally this prayer was found in Masses for Easter, though now it is restricted to Ordinary Time. With this shift came some changes to the vocabulary of the prayer, however the oration retains much of its original sense. In effect the prayer is a recapitulation of the Pauline economy of salvation in Christ, and strongly resonates with the Letter to the Galatians. The oration is motivated by our faith that we have

been redeemed in Christ, and as well been offered a new status as adopted children of God, a tacit link to baptism. Freedom in Christ, redemption, and adoption are experienced as acts of God's gracious mercy. Our petition is that the gracious God grant us true freedom and eternal inheritance. These gifts are the direct continuation of redemption and adoption.

True freedom involves internal freedom in the Spirit, as well as liberation, in Christ, from death and sin, evil, and the oppressive weight of the old Law. In this freedom, we Christians are called to serve one another in love, our lives manifesting the fruits of the Spirit. Through our liberty in Christ, we experience in part the inheritance that our adoption promises. Yet we receive the fullness of this inheritance in heaven, where, living the fullness of life in Christ and the Spirit, we will live as children of God, free from all sin and death. (Gerard Moore)

First Reading

Wisdom of Solomon 9:13–18

We desire to live a purposeful life, and one worthy of the goodness of God, but how can we possibly know what that is? We are acutely aware of our limitations. Yet, we are not left rudderless. God's very presence is offered to us. God grants us wisdom and direction through God's very spirit.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 89:3-6, 12-14, 17. R. v. 1

In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Echoing the first reading, the psalm acknowledges God's ways are infinitely above ours. Yet God's blessings need not be distant from us. We place our hope in the majesty of God, that the Lord's eternal favour be on our mortal lives.

Second Reading

Philemon 9–10, 12–17

Paul speaks on behalf of the slave Onesimus, beseeching Onesimus' master to remember that the slave is more than what society may deem him to be. As a baptised member of the Body of Christ, he is a 'beloved brother' and should be welcomed back as one would welcome any brother or sister in Christ.

Gospel Reading

Luke 14:25–33

As is often the case, Jesus is being followed by a great crowd. The crowd may be a sign of popularity at this stage of the story, but popularity is not a guaranteed part of Jesus' ministry. The closer Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, the more focussed the

challenge of the cross becomes. To follow Christ is to lay aside all else for the sake of the kingdom.

Reflection

Some years ago, my family and I were lucky enough to attend large and exciting theme park in Europe. We were not at all familiar with the venue, so when we entered, though we had a map in hand, we did not know the nature of the attractions. We quickly found ourselves just following our noses, heading in no particular direction. We came to what must have been one of the first major attractions. We knew this because there was a large crowd heading there among which we found ourselves. While waiting in the lengthy queue, we talked among ourselves trying to work out what exactly we were lining up for. It was not that clear because there were actually a few attractions indicated on the map effectively on top of one another. When we finally entered the ride, which was not visible on the outside where we queued, we were surprised to find it was one of the scariest rides in the park. We endured rather than enjoyed it (though one of my children was quite happy with it) and made sure from then on that we were clear where any given crowd led before following along.

Crowds create something of their own momentum. There is something about human nature where we love to follow a crowd. For better or worse, we often go where the hype and the noise is and that is typically where the actual or, in our modern world, where the virtual crowd is. If something is popular, we assume its worthy of our attention.

Of course, it is worthwhile to follow Jesus. We know from other parts of the Gospels that Jesus' large following was on account of the many great works and wonderful teachings that came with his presence. However, perhaps Jesus' words today come forth because he was acutely aware that people often follow a crowd for the crowd's sake. That we simply go along with what is popular because we are attracted to the hype but do not really pay attention to the substance. Like our day at the European theme park, we weren't really aware of where the crowd was heading.

As if to emphasise this notion, Luke points out that Jesus 'turned and spoke to them' (v. 25). It seems innocuous, but it is one of only two occasions that Jesus is said to do that to a gathered crowd (the other being during the passion (Lk 23:27-28) where Jesus turns and addresses a group who were mourning and lamenting). It appears to be an action intended to stop everybody in their tracks, both the people in the narrative and us today.

Jesus seems determined to make it clear what discipleship really entails. Nobody should be following Jesus simply because it is attractive or popular or seen as the thing to do. Jesus makes this clear with some of the most difficult language of the Gospels. Whoever wishes to follow Jesus without hating one's closest family members cannot be a disciple, a true follower. If that is not enough, Jesus adds, that they must even hate one's own life too! Surely that is going to thin the 'great crowd'. But Jesus does not stop there because he states that following him entails carrying one's cross. We know the greater narrative, and so we recognise what the cross

represents, but we risk missing the point if we overly theologise the moment. The people of Jesus' day knew well what a cross meant. It was brutal and it was dehumanising. With such a teaching, one would be surprised if anybody was left following once Jesus turned back and continued on his journey to Jerusalem.

So, what of this? Is Jesus insisting that we literally hate our closest companions in life. That would seem counter to wider biblical teaching. We have heard similar some Sunday's ago where Jesus claims that his presence will bring animosity, even between parent and child (Lk 12:51-53). We noted then that such a teaching is to make clear the significance of what choosing Christ and Christ's ways entails. It is not a given that such division should naturally occur, but there is a definitive choice to be made, and sometimes a difficult one.

It would seem Jesus is presenting a similar angle here. One can follow Jesus on a whim; we might go along with the crowd as it were, while it is popular and does not ruffle feathers or cause offence. We might be happy to call ourselves Christian if the cost is quite bearable. However, Jesus might be telling us that if we think Christianity is simply that all the time, then we are building a weak foundation for our faith. The wise builder knows the ground one is building upon, goes in open eyed and lays a foundation that can stand the forces of nature and the test of time.

Jesus is speaking of extremes here, there is little doubt of that. One cannot be a well-balanced human being of any description much less Christian and actively hate one's closest family. It is not that which Jesus is presenting. But Jesus is saying that the life of Christ, with all its blessings, is one that requires dedication and may at times include confronting decisions.

It is well noted by scholars that the word commonly translated as 'hate' in this text is not a perfect rendering of the original Greek. We tend to think of 'hate' as an ongoing psychological or emotional abhorring. Rather, the Greek *miseō* is more like giving up or renouncing as an act of will. It is an 'ordering of value' that we have seen elsewhere in the Gospels where Jesus stresses that renouncing all things and committing to God first will see all things 'granted besides' (Lk 12:31).

We must assume that the same principle is being expressed here. This teaching is a wakeup call, made in hyperbolic terms, to the reality of what the full life of God entails. It is a 'giving up' and a dedication that requires sacrifice – but it is not for its own sake. It is such that we come into the love of God. In the love of God, we truly discover the love of all things, including the love of family and all else worthwhile. 'Your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.' (Lk 12:30b-31)

Thus, today's Gospel is obviously not a call to fanaticism but, once again, to deep trust. Loving God and then loving all else (family included) in God. It is a spiritual call to conversion where we see the true worth of all things by contemplating first the worth and love of God.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The psalmist declares that in every age God has been our refuge. Let us therefore offer our needs in humility and trust.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, clergy, religious and laity. May they continue to lead us through the Plenary Council and the Synod of 2023 with humility and trust knowing that there will be difficult decisions to be made that will affect all of us.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of the global community. May they seek true wisdom in their decisions rather than popularity so that justice and equity will become more evident in their nations.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who care for the earth following the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for Creation last Thursday. May we all, in our own humble context, show concern for what God has created for us and work together for a cleaner, safer environment.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are addicted to power and popularity in every level of society, in the world of social media and in our lived context of home, work or study. May they find the strength and wisdom to follow true values and so make a positive contribution to our world.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who suffer from disabilities and social discomfort from the attitudes of others. May we always witness to the value of each human person from the beginning of life to its natural end.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the community gathered here. May we follow Christ in our everyday lives and stay true to gospel values even when there are confronting decisions to be made.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of Creation, you have given us the gift of our earth and all within it. In faith we know that our prayer will be answered through the power of the Spirit and in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	AOVNG	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1
Be thou my vision	9					733	455	
Christ is made the sure foundation					482	640		
Come and follow me				25				
Eye has not seen	146				466			
Go to the world!							496	
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54				468		512	
Lead me, Lord								107
Lord, be my vision					733			
Lord of creation, to you be all praise					423	739	543	
Now thank we all our God	189				425	755	561	
O breathe on me, O breath of God					432	758	564	
O God, our help in ages past	175				459	767	568	
O God, you search me		31					572	
Seek ye first	48				456		594	160
Take up your cross							612	
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord					550		213	
The hound of heaven		79			81	795	505	
The Summons				149			645	137
This day God gives me					536	840	625	
This is my will, my one command					465	842	626	
To live like Jesus			160					
Unless a grain of wheat	35				500		635	
What a friend we have in Jesus			117					
When I survey the wondrous cross					330	862	329	
When the King shall come again							249	
Word of God, come down on earth							644	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 89: *In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.*

	CWB	JOBC	LPC
Psalm 89	402	pg. 84	pg. 139