

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 7, 2025

A brother, not slave.

Who can know the mind of God?

All are One in Christ.

-rvb

Reading 1

[Wisdom 9:13-18b](#)

Who can know God's counsel,
or who can conceive what the LORD intends?
For the deliberations of mortals are timid,
and unsure are our plans.
For the corruptible body burdens the soul
and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.
And scarce do we guess the things on earth,
and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty;
but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?
Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?
And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

In this reading from Wisdom, the author addresses the Jews living in Egypt. They were a minority group living in a culture influenced by Greek philosophy (not the worst influence). The author suggests a balanced approach between the wisdom of God and the intellectual humility (search for the truth) of rational human beings who seek

wisdom as ultimately a gift from God – faith seeking reason and reason seeking faith.

Intellectually humble individuals acknowledge they do not know much about the world of knowledge, but seek to expand their horizons of understanding, recognizing their intellectual limitations allows them to expand further their intellectual capacity while being open to dismissing: their erroneous thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and opinions. Intellectual humility enhances learning, decision-making, interpersonal relationships and adaptability, leading to personal growth and improved interactions with others and our personal communication with God through prayer and adult catechesis. And, as Socrates and Plato would say relative to be intellectual humble:

The famous quote by Socrates is "I know that I know nothing." This statement reflects his belief in the importance of recognizing one's own ignorance as a step towards gaining true knowledge. It is derived from Plato's account of Socrates in the "Apology," where he emphasizes that acknowledging one's lack of knowledge is a form of wisdom. Socrates' philosophy encourages critical thinking and self-examination, suggesting that true wisdom comes from understanding the limits of one's knowledge. -Internet,

As we hear in the responsorial psalm, ‘Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart.’ Wisdom is a gift given to us by God; it is readily acquired by effort and discipline. Now that school has begun, OK kids and adults, it is time to do your homework! Cultivating intellectual humility not only benefits individuals by enhancing their personal growth and learning, but also positively impacts their relationships and decision-making abilities. By embracing a mindset that values curiosity and openness, individuals can navigate the complexities of life more effectively and foster a more collaborative understanding environment around them as they are lifted on the wings of God’s Wisdom of faith, hope, and love. Despite knowing this, certain aspects of the truth of history are being erased or rewritten by ignorant leaders who are afraid of the truth.

St. Augustine, whose feast day we celebrated August 28 is hailed as one of the greatest theologians in the history of the Catholic Church. He had a conversion when he was 33, enlightened by the Wisdom of scriptures. In his autobiography entitled “Confessions,” he wrote of this metanoia, his change of heart, mind, and soul: “Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! And

behold, you were within me, and I was outside, and there I sought you, and in my deformity, I rushed headlong into the well-formed things that you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. Those outer beauties held me far from you, yet if they had not been in you, they would not have existed at all. You called and cried out to me and broke open my deafness, you shone forth upon me and you scattered my blindness. You breathed fragrance, and I drew my breath, and I now pant for you: I tasted, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for Your peace.” -Confessions of Augustine of Hippo, selected writings, p. 144,

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17

R. (1) In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

You turn man back to dust,

saying, “Return, O children of men.”

For a thousand years in your sight

are as yesterday, now that it is past,

or as a watch of the night.

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

You make an end of them in their sleep;

the next morning they are like the changing grass,

Which at dawn springs up anew,

but by evening wilts and fades.

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

Teach us to number our days aright,

that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!
R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!
R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Reading 2

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

I, Paul, an old man,
and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus,
urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus,
whose father I have become in my imprisonment;
I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.
I should have liked to retain him for myself,
so that he might serve me on your behalf
in my imprisonment for the gospel,
but I did not want to do anything without your consent,
so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary.
Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while,
that you might have him back forever,
no longer as a slave
but more than a slave, a brother,
beloved especially to me, but even more so to you,
as a man and in the Lord.
So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

In this interesting and relevant reading from Philemon in terms of racism,
this single and controversial issue has been and still is deeply rooted today.

Paul wrestles with his dilemma to support and aid Onesimus, a runaway slave whom Paul met while in prison. Paul's appeal on behalf of Onesimus is love. His argument is made with the assurance that those who are partners in one faith and one Spirit also share the common directives of love by which their common life in Christ finds expression. Onesimus is welcomed back even as Paul himself would be received – a Christian brother who is free to come and go as the tasks of his ministry require. This is a heavy and challenging message Paul places on the shoulders, conscience, and heart of Philemon. Paul's exhortation carries an added subtlety by saying, if you reject Onesimus, you are rejecting me for I am sending my heart back to you in the person of Onesimus. Their common life in Christ is the motto chosen by Pope Leo 14: His episcopal motto is, "In Illo uno unum," or literally "In the One, we are one." Vatican News explained that the phrase is taken from St. Augustine's "Exposition on Psalm 127," where he explains that "although we Christians are many, in the one Christ we are one."

However, we are far from our oneness, now and historically. Michael Gerson, speech writer to George Bush is quoted by Jim Wallis in his book, *The False White Gospel*, "The country was soiled by the sin of slavery from

its birth...White Americans established a social and religious system designed to grant themselves dominance, often while trying to convince African Americans of God's lower regard for their souls. Slaves were raped with impunity and murdered without consequence. So, if you still believe in the words of Jesus, speak up! We need everyone to challenge those former generation leaders who have sold out the Gospel for their politics."

Pp. 61-62.

Alleluia

[Psalm 119:135](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let your face shine upon your servant;
and teach me your laws.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

[Luke 14:25-33](#)

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus,
and he turned and addressed them,
"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.

**Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me
cannot be my disciple.**

Which of you wishing to construct a tower
does not first sit down and calculate the cost
to see if there is enough for its completion?
Otherwise, after laying the foundation
and finding himself unable to finish the work

the onlookers should laugh at him and say,
'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.'
Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down
and decide whether with ten thousand troops
he can successfully oppose another king
advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?
But if not, while he is still far away,
he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms.

**In the same way,
anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions
cannot be my disciple."**

A reflection, exegesis, and commentary on the scriptures.

In today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus addresses the elephant in the room, the stark and challenging demands of discipleship. If Jesus is accepted first, paralysis of the mind and heart fade away. First and foremost, in one's life all other dimensions of life are enriched, enhanced, and fulfilled. A true and faithful disciple who embraces the cross is a very wise person, for the cross is inevitable and the resurrection is a surprise. The heart of a disciple pursues the heart of God. The hungry heart is no longer a lonely hunter, for God dwells deep within injecting life, vision, and vitality into the spiritual pulse of a restless disciple.

One Sunday morning a preacher delivered a "hellfire and brimstone" sermon. His trembling voice shook people in their comfortable pews. He shouted, "Whoever wants to go to heaven, stand up!" The whole

congregation spung to its feet as if the pews were wired for electric shock. However, a lonely cowboy remained glued to his pew. The preacher glared at him and his face became fiery red as he hurled words of condemnation at him. One by one the congregation sat down in the tension of the moment. Slowly the cowboy rose to his feet. He began to amble down the aisle. Only his spurs broke the silence. The preacher and the cowboy stood face-to-face like an umpire and catcher at home plate. The cowboy grabbed his colt 45, turned towards the people, and aimed it at the whites of their eyes. "Now," growled the cowboy, "anyone who wants to go to heaven, stand up!"

Christianity is a blend of "cheap" and "costly" grace. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes in unsettling terms what it means to be a follower of Jesus. "Cheap" grace is knowing the message of Jesus without doing anything about it. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, without the cross, without Jesus living and incarnate. "Costly" grace is costly because it ultimately demands the person's life. It challenges us to live the Gospels, to pray and to step out of the circle of the silent majority to live as Jesus did, that is, as the life of a radical Jew. It is costly because today's disciple must ask, "How do I follow Jesus in a world that does not necessarily embrace

the values of the Gospels? Chesterton said, Christianity has not failed, for it has never been tried.”

As a radical Jew, Jesus is not afraid to confront the establishment and to demand a decision: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you frauds” (Matthew 23.23); “This is the time of fulfillment...Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1.15ff); “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16.24). Mark’s Jesus is in a hurry. He feels a sense of urgency, and he is driven. He confronts the leaders in the marketplace. The leaders are slaves of convention, custom, tradition, titles, and drunk with power. Jesus has a showdown in the temple. Prayer is pushed aside for the sake of profit. The leader’s “prey” on others rather than “pray” for others. The holy sanctuary fades into the darkness of greed, power, and prestige.

Jesus has a showdown with himself. He wonders, “Am I the one, am I ready to face the consequences of my words and beliefs? Jesus is a prophet who is overflowing with the torrents of “costly” grace. He demands decision, sacrifice, action, and rejection. He accepts no less than our lives being turned around, inside out, and our priorities reversed.

Like Jesus, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a Russian writer who confronted the then leaders of Russia were seized by the power of “costly” grace when he challenged the leaders of oppression and Harvard graduates years later in 1983 to return to God: “The entire twentieth century is being sucked into the vortex of atheism and self-destruction. We can only reach with determination for the warm hand of God, which we have so rashly and self-confidently pushed away...There is nothing else to cling to in the landslide” (Time, May 23, 1983, p. 57).

Jesus’ words rattle our souls. He says “no” to life the way it is, and “yes” to something of greater meaning. He says “no” to a world based on power, prestige, and position – the three great temptations of Jesus. He says “no” to a long list of ills that confront us, and “yes” to the kingdom of love as embraced by our discipleship. Love is the only force that can call forth the full spiritual power of costly grace within us. We cannot commit the sin of looking the other way and settling down in our comfortable pews.

Final prayer: Lord of the oppressed, sow the seeds of social justice within us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Strengthen us to serve one another in Jesus’ name for we are ALL ONE IN CHRIST who is true and authentic wisdom now and forever. Amen.

