

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Wisdom 9:13-18a

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.

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.

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.”

Exegesis

Wisdom 9:13-18a

The *Book of Wisdom*, sometimes referred to as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, was composed approximately 100 years before Christ. It is believed to have originated from Alexandria one of the largest Jewish communities formed out of the diaspora. Most scholars agree that the original language of composition was Greek. The author was a Jewish teacher living in a Greek speaking area who had an in depth understanding of Hebrew Scripture. The book gives us additional insight into the deeper meaning of Hebrew words and truths as articulated in the Greek language. A particular example is the word that we translate as *being* in English. The Greek word is *eimi* and it means *to be*, *to exist*, or *being*. The word, as used in Hebrews 11:6, means to exist without contingency. This is significant in that God reveals Himself as “I Am who Am,” (Hebrew *ehyeh aser ehyeh*), *the One whose nature is to be*, i.e. *being itself* and therefore existing without contingency.

In verse 1:14 God is assuring us that He wants to share His life with us, “For He fashioned all things that they might have being.” Jesus, in words captured by St. John the beloved disciple, further states this in the famous passage John 3:16, “For God so love the world that He gave his only Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.” *Wisdom* states in verse 2:23, “For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of His own nature he made him.” *Being*, *to be*, *eternal life*, *imperishable*, are all terms that describe God’s nature, a nature that He desires to share with us. In the creation story of *Genesis* God clearly reveals that He is the source of our being, “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (*nepes/psyche/soul*).” (Gn 2:7).

Our pericope is taken from a section that is titled *Solomon’s Prayer for Wisdom*. It pleased God that Solomon prayed for wisdom above all else. “Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge Your people and to distinguish right from wrong.” (1 Kgs 3: 9). “Give me, therefore, wisdom and knowledge to lead this people, for otherwise who could rule this great people of Yours?” (2 Chr 1: 10).

The prayer consists of eighteen verses and can be broken down into three distinct sections or strophes. The sections are vs 1-6, 7-12, and 13-18. In the first strophe Solomon is asking God for Wisdom because he is a human being who lacks comprehension because of his mere human nature. In the second strophe Solomon is asking for Wisdom to be with him to disclose what is pleasing to God. In the third strophe, our pericope, Solomon acknowledges that we cannot know God’s counsel or intentions without the gift of Wisdom.

Who can know God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? In a similar manner the Prophet Isaiah acknowledges our need for God’s counsel. “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or has instructed Him as his counselor?” (Is 40: 13).

For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. The Greek word for *soul* in this verse is *psyche*. This verse echoes the thought of Greek philosophy in that the body weighs down the soul that seeks things of the Spirit. Job echoes these thoughts: “Can a man be righteous as against God? Can a mortal be blameless against his Maker? Lo, He puts no trust in His servants, and with His angels He can find fault. How much more with those that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is the dust, who are crushed more easily than the moth.” (Job 4: 18-19).

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? “Heaven’s height, earth’s breadth, the depth of the abyss: who can explore these?” (Sir 1: 3).

Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? This passage unites the revelation of Wisdom, Sophia, of the OT with the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the NT. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in My name; He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” (Jn 14: 26).

Exegesis (Continued)

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

Psalm 90 is entitled *God's Eternity and Human Frailty – A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God*, and consists of seventeen verses. It begins with the assurance that God has been our refuge through all generations, through all time. In theological terms God is outside of or beyond time. Time is a part of God's creation, a part of created reality. As human beings we are born into and travel through time. In the Greek language there are two words for time. One is *chronos* which describes chronological time. The other is *kyros*, which speaks of a moment in time when all is present. God lives in *kyros* time. God lives in the eternal present. All of time is present to God at once. We in turn travel through time.

You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men." Our time on earth has a beginning and it has an end. Wisdom of heart comes with a consciousness of this reality. The psalmist reminds us that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night. St Peter reminds us of the fact that God is beyond the constraints of time: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." (2 Pt 3: 8).

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. The second image of this fleeting world is that of grass that springs up in the morning and withers in the evening, a reminder of temporal reality. The true frailty of humanity is our mortality. Wisdom of heart is guidance for life, living this life in the reality that we are just passing through. The psalmist prays for refuge from this reality and for love and joy on the journey to match our days of affliction. Ultimately, however, we are called to set our sights beyond this passing world, which is true wisdom.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. The Hebrew word for *wisdom* in this verse is *hakmah*. *Hakmah* describes a knowledge or a skill that comes from experience. Coming to grips with this fleeting world and our human mortality, gives us the proper state of mind to turn toward God, the eternal One.

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. The Hebrew word translated as *kindness* in this verse is *hesed*. *Hesed* is most often translated as *steadfast love*. The fact that God is Love and that God is eternal and immutable gives us an anchor point in this fleeting world in which we live.

In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge. Scripture reveals God, Himself, as a place of refuge for the human soul. "Be my rock and refuge, my secure stronghold; for you are my rock and fortress." (Ps 71: 3). The Hebrew word that is translated as *refuge* is *maon*. *Maon* is sometimes translated as *dwelling place*. The word connotes a place, a dwelling, a home.

Exegesis (Continued)

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

The Letter to Philemon was written by St. Paul during a period of imprisonment, probably in Rome between the years 61 and 63. The letter is addressed from Paul and Timothy and directed to three individuals; Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus. The understanding is that Onesimus personally delivered this letter.

Our pericope is often titled *Paul's Plea for Onesimus*. Paul is interceding for the slave named Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave that was owned by Philemon of Colossae. Onesimus had escaped from Philemon, and it is suggested that there was some theft involved in the process. Onesimus would have known of his master's esteem for Paul, which was probably why he sought him out. Paul apparently gave him refuge.

Onesimus was in a deeply precarious position, in that under Roman law, the death penalty was to be imposed on a slave who escaped the bonds of his/her owner. The prescribed penalty was crucifixion. Historians tell us that there were actually more slaves than free people in the Roman provinces. Because of this the penalty for escape was harsh in order to deter escape attempts.

St. Paul converted Onesimus to the Christian faith.

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. The Greek word that is translated in this verse as *old man* is *presbyter*, which can also mean *ambassador*. The name *Onesimus* means *useful, beneficial* or *profitable*. In his letter to the Colossians Paul also mentions the sending of Onesimus. "I am sending him (Tychicus) to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us and that he may encourage your hearts, together with Onesimus, a trustworthy and beloved brother, who is one of you." (Col 4: 8-9a). Paul has used the image of a spiritual father in other letters. "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." (1 Cor 4: 15).

Paul is pleading with Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom. Although he feels that he could demand this of Philemon, he is imploring Philemon to show forgiveness and mercy toward his former slave. Elsewhere in his writings Paul suggests that when a slave converts to Christianity he should be freed. "For the slave called in the Lord is a freed person in the Lord, just as the free person who has been called is a slave of Christ." (1 Cor 7: 22).

Paul further taught that we are all one in Christ Jesus. "For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3: 26-28).

Philemon is a story of grace and mercy. Onesimus was a man condemned to death for his sins. With the slavery of sin washed away in baptism, he is set free by grace.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 14:25-33

This weekend the setting of the Gospel remains the same, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to embrace the Cross and He is healing and teaching along the way. Large crowds follow Him. After a brief introduction our Gospel pericope consists entirely of the words of Jesus. Our selected passage is titled in many translations: *The Cost of Discipleship*.

“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.” Matthew quotes a similar saying of Jesus that seems less harsh. “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Mt 10: 37). The Greek word translated as *hate* in this verse is *miseo*. *Miseo* denotes an attitude or a mode of action and not emotions. The point is not how one feels toward parents and family but one’s effective attitude when it comes to a choice of the kingdom; the choice involved in the terms is clear from vs. 16:13. “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.” (Lk 16: 13). The Greek word translated as *life* in this verse is *psyche* which is the Greek word for *soul*. It is also translated as *soul, spirit, being or life*. St. Paul uses the word *psyche* in his farewell speech at Miletus as captured in Acts. “But I do not account my life (*psyche*) of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20: 24). Speaking of the Church Triumphant, Acts also uses the word *psyche* to describe those who have conquered the devil. “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives (*psyche*) even unto death. ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!” (Rev 12: 11-12).

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Again, Matthew has a similar quotation from Jesus. “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Mt 10: 38). The Greek word for *carry* in Luke’s Gospel verse is *bastazo*. *Bastazo* is also translated *bear, lift up, or raise*. Matthew uses the Greek word *lambano* to describe this action. *Lambano* means to *accept, receive or take*. Luke is stressing the burden of accepting the cross. Luke also stresses the personal nature of this action by adding the words *his own*. It is *heautou* in the original Greek which means *one-self*. During His first prediction of His Passion, when talking about the cost of discipleship, Jesus stressed that one must do this daily. “Then He said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’” (Lk 9: 23).

Matthew uses the phrase *not worthy of Me*, while Luke employs the wording *cannot be My disciple*. The Greek word for *disciple* is *mathetes*. Luke emphasizes the summons to discipleship. The word *mathetes* appears often in his Gospel, especially on His journey to Jerusalem, e.g., Lk 9:14, 16, 18, 40, 43, 54; 10:22, 23; 11:1; 12:1, 22.

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.’ This little parable and the one to follow are unique to Luke’s Gospel. The *tower* in sacred scripture is symbolic of bridging the divide between heaven and earth, e.g., the tower of Babel. Jesus emphasizes the fact that there is a necessary expenditure of resources to bridge this divide, ultimately the cost is the Cross.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 14:25-33

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. From the very beginning of His public ministry, and even from the beginning of His conception, Jesus was confronted by Satan and his dominions. Jesus talked plainly of this battle between the kingdoms as recorded in Luke 11: 18-20. To a disciple means to be engaged in the battle against the forces of darkness.

“In the same way, anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” The Greek word translated as *renounce* in this verse is *apotasso*, which literally means *bid farewell to*. The Greek words for *all possessions* are *ta hyparcho*. *Hyparcho* includes all property, goods, and belongings.

Reflection

This weekend's Gospel includes some of the most difficult and challenging words of Jesus ever recorded. Jesus tells us that to truly be His disciple we must hate mother, father, sister and brother. Jesus, after all, commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves and demands that we even love our enemies. I went to the original Greek to see if perhaps the translation of the word "hate" was really accurate. It is, but it is more about detachment than emotion. These difficult words led me deeper in prayer this week.

My prayer led me to the last line of the Gospel. Jesus says, "Anyone who does not renounce his possessions cannot be my disciple." Maybe the foundational principle of self-giving love, of detachment, of dying to self is the key to understanding this teaching of Jesus. We often view love and family relationships as serving our needs, as attachments and possessions of ours. We say my sister, my brother, my mother, my father. Often young people in love get very possessive of each other. This primordial need of our fallen human nature to possess can lead to unhealthy and even destructive relationships. Authentic love must be absolutely and unconditionally free. Love must be the total gift of self, and demand nothing, and desire nothing but the good of the other.

God is love. God is total gift of self. We were created in God's own image and likeness. We were created out of love and for love. Jesus challenges us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. This is a call to fulfill the purpose for which we were created, to live a life of authentic self-giving love. Authentic love has its very source in God, so our true calling is to allow God to love in and through us. This divine love in us transcends all human limitations and raises us to a new level of being. It is called Grace. It will transform us, our families and our environments. Only in this truth can real happiness and joy be found. Discovering this truth is authentic wisdom,

Our first reading today from the Book of Wisdom explains this detachment as that which "is within our grasp (that) we find with difficulty." Picking up our cross, dying to ourselves, to our ego, is difficult indeed. In the words of the great St. Augustine, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves." Yet, God is often difficult to find and difficult to encounter. This is because of that giant first step that each of us must take, i.e. dying to self. We have to move beyond the ego to encounter God. The Good News is that God wants an encounter with each of us, so take that first step!

Come Holy Spirit full the hearts of us
Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In the name of Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

Twelve years ago, I gathered with my seminary classmates for an anniversary celebration and retreat. Our seminary rector, Monsignor John Canary joined us as our retreat director. It was a joy filled and very prayerful time for all of us. We were able to reminisce on our seminary experiences and share our experiences of priesthood. One of the first questions that Msgr. Canary asked us was, "What was the most notable surprise of your first 15 years of priesthood, or what caught you most off guard, or what did you feel least prepared for?" Everyone, to a man, said, "The level of resistance and opposition to the faith." That question initiated several hours of discussion.

I discovered that my experience was very similar to each of my classmates. Most of us were quite immersed in Catholicism at various stages of our lives, beginning with a strong family experience, perhaps a Catholic grammar or high school experience, and then we spent five years in a Catholic seminary. Holy, friendly surroundings form a bit of insulation from outside adversaries. A grace filled environment also provides a bit of a shield from the attacks of Satan and his dominions. At Mundelein Seminary, for example, we had an order of holy nuns whose sole apostolate was to pray for us seminarians 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They spent those hours in perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It provided a shield that Satan could not pierce.

Entering parish ministry meant going out into the world, into the wilderness. Parishioners are quite diverse in their level of faith, from the very devout and pious to the unbeliever who is only there because of spouse or family. The parish exists within a secular culture of indifference and hostility. The Body of Christ is open and vulnerable. The doors are open wide for all to enter or pass by. Satan and his forces are working 24/7 to infiltrate, attack, divide, harass, oppose, discourage, and destroy. To a man each of my classmates joined me in expressing a feeling of "battle fatigue."

Each of us felt that we were on the front lines of intense and unrelenting spiritual warfare. The Church, the office of the priesthood, marriages, family life, life itself is under attack. I shared with the group that when I engaged the enemy with intentionality, I soon realized that I had a great leviathan by the tail, and I could not let go. There was collateral damage as I was being tossed around and often consumed with the struggle. As I focused on the enemy I took my eyes off Christ.

Then as I was being pulled under, I reached out my hand and Jesus was there to pull me out of the raging sea. I found myself standing on the Rock that is Christ. The experience of the battle, the woundedness, the rejection, the vitriol hatred, enveloped me into the pierced heart of Jesus. At that moment I could say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me." I am now aware that the Passion of Christ is an ongoing ever-present reality. Each of us must die with Him to live with Him.

The Good News is that we know how this ends. The battle, the victory, has already been won. The Cross is barren, and the tomb is empty. Msgr. Canary reminded us to persevere, to stay the course. He pointed out to us how the battle has drawn us all closer to Christ and to His Church. He reminded us that only in sharing in Christ's passion can we be authentic disciples and holy priests. We left, wounds healed and filled with gratitude!

