**23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

READINGS: Wisdom 9:13-18 /Philemon 9-10, 12-17/Luke 14:25-33

THEME: SEEK CHRIST FIRST

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

To a great crowd of people following Jesus for various reasons (healing, miracles, curiosity, etc.), He said: ‘If any one comes to me and does not ***hate*** his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:26-27).

By this statement, Jesus is not asking us to ‘**hate**’ [deeply dislike] those who are closest and dearest to us; for that will contradict the commandments to ‘honour your father and mother’, and ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Besides how can we ‘**hate**’ ourselves if we are to love others as ourselves?

So what then is Jesus telling us to do? ***He is saying that we should hold Him first in our lives; we must be ready to sacrifice even what is nearest and dearest to us if it hinders our relationship with Him.***  If, for instance, one is truly convinced that Jesus is calling him into the priesthood whilst parents are not happy about it, he should heed to the voice of the Lord, rather than the wish of the parents. Again, if (in a trying moment in their marriage) a man/woman asks the spouse to use a corrupt means so that their family can live a ‘comfortable’ life, that spouse should rather listen to Christ’s voice. Certainly in the above instances one’s relationship with the parents or spouse would be strained; but one is not to ‘**hate**’ them.

Furthermore, Christ is asking us to deny our very selves of anything good or bad that hinders our relationship with Him. It is good, for instance, to work hard; but if the three jobs we are doing amount to having little or no time to worship our Lord, then there is a call to cut down on our ‘busy-ness’ and give priority to the Lord! And certainly when it comes to anything considered ‘bad’ (drunkenness, fornication, etc.) in the sight of the Lord, we should waste no time at all to abandon it!

Why is Christ’s demand so high? It is so, because (in the wisdom of God: 1st reading) that is how we can walk the winding and narrow path that leads to heaven: that is how we can take up our cross and follow the Lord, who walks ahead of us to heaven. How can we follow the footsteps of the Lord if we do not walk the difficult ‘way of the cross’?

Beloved, St. Paul who was imprisoned for the sake of Christ and yet cheerfully ministered to Philemon and Onesimus, and Philemon who accepted his runaway slave no longer as a slave but as a ‘beloved brother’ in Christ (2nd reading) carried their own crosses along the path to heaven. Our crosses may be different, but in every situation, we should seek Christ first.

Once again, let us take a cue from the prisoner St. Paul: ‘Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean He no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:35-39). Amen!