

23rd Sunday per Annum - C
Wisdom 9:13-18b;
Philemon 9-10, 12-17;
Luke 14:25-33
Little Flower - 9/4/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from the Book of Wisdom reminds us of our human limitations: "*For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.*" Although my guess is that the phrase "earthen shelter" also refers to the body, I think that it can also be applied to all that is going on in our lives. As a consequence, we often are unable to see the big picture. We often fall victim to tunnel vision and think we know more than we know.

When I give marriage instructions, I always tell the story of one of my former students. Over the years I have watched she and her husband make consistently good decisions. I finally figured out that it was because she knows what she does not know. She knows when they need to slow down, do more research, or seek advice. She understands the old saying, "Make haste slowly." On a purely human level, wisdom consists in knowing what we do not know.

On the other hand, God sees the big picture. Wisdom, of course, is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. If we want to see the big picture, if we want to see as God sees, as today's reading from Wisdom suggests, we need the wisdom that comes from God. For example, when we make moral decisions, we often make them on the basis of what we believe is right for us right now without necessarily seeing how they will impact others or even how they might impact us and others long term. On the contrary, God sees the big picture, and the Catholic moral tradition represents the Christian wisdom of the ages.

Today's Gospel has three messages for us. Jesus tells us that we must hate our family and our life and renounce all our possessions if we want to be his disciples. Obviously Jesus does not intend for us to take him literally. He certainly does not want us to hate our family or our life or even to renounce all our possessions. Rather, he wants us to put him first in our lives.

Second, Jesus tells us that we must take up our own cross and come after him, or we cannot be his disciples. As Christians we do not need to look for crosses. All of us have crosses in our lives. As Jesus said, "*Each day has enough trouble of its own*" [Mt. 6:34]. Taking up our own cross and coming after Jesus means dealing with what life deals us as Jesus did—with faith, hope, and love.

Third, the examples of building a tower or marching into battle call us to be prepared. Habit 2 of Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* states, "Begin with the end in mind." This represents both human wisdom and God's wisdom. We need to keep in mind and judge all things in light of our end goal, which should be heaven, i.e. life after life.

My brothers and sisters, Paul's letter to Philemon is the shortest of Paul's letters. Paul had converted and grown close to Philemon's runaway slave Onesimus. He wanted to keep Onesimus with him, but he did not feel free to do that. Therefore, he appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in the Lord. In Galatians, Paul wrote, "*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*" [3:28]. In this time of divisions within all of the communities of which we are part, including the Church, this is perhaps the most important piece of God's wisdom for us today.