**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)**

Saint Boniface I, Pope; Saint Rosalia of Palermo, Virgin Hermit

Wis 9:13-18b; Ps 90; Phmn 9-10,12-17; Lk 14:25-33

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

**COMMENTARY**

*The Highest Point of Wisdom*

The wisdom instructions of Jesus, which we have heard in recent Sundays, reach the highest and most controversial point with today’s teaching. The Master of Nazareth, addressing “great crowds” who followed him in the now final stage of his journey to Jerusalem, posed the radical demands for his potential followers. These are very strong recommendations that undermine every human “sound mind”, starting with the request to “hate” one’s parents: “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother (...), he cannot be my disciple.” The phrase in the original Greek sounds exactly like that with the verb *miseo* “to hate” which various modern translations avoid precisely because of its emotional charge, preferring a “softer” version: “If someone comes to me and does not love me more than he loves his father and mother (...), he cannot be my disciple.” Such strong words of Jesus do not seem to be said “at random” or lightly (as shared to me by a Vietnamese Buddhist who, while noting the instructions of Jesus in question too difficult to understand, underlined simply: “If Jesus said so, there must be some sense!”). These words therefore ask all of us to seriously reflect on their meaning and, consequently, on our call to follow Jesus.

*1. The Radical Renunciation of All “Possessions”*

To understand Jesus’ teaching in today’s Gospel, we should note its specific structure (technically called *inclusio*), where the concluding sentence recalls the initial one to accentuate the central point of the whole discourse: “Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” In light of this conclusion, the initial request to every potential disciple to “hate” “his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life” actually concerns the renunciation of all possessions that one has and cultivates.

We have heard in the past the recommendation of Jesus to abandon material possessions to enter the Kingdom of God. Now, Jesus recommends the would-be disciple to make a radical and heroic renunciation of love for family members and even of his/her life itself. In other words, the disciple is asked to love Jesus above his/her dearest persons and above himself/herself, as is made explicit in the parallel text of Matthew’s Gospel: “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 renunciation that Jesus asks of each of his disciples here is what He already practiced for God, for the Kingdom and to fulfill the mission of God. He, in fact, left everything and everyone to dedicate himself totally and freely to the cause of the Kingdom, as well as to form the new family of God according to the divine plan of salvation. Therefore, in the recommendation to “hate” parents, in the sense of “loving less” or “abandoning”, the commandment of the Decalogue to honor the father and mother is not questioned; the focus is rather on the concrete practice of the first command of all the divine law: to love God above everything/everyone and with all the heart, the mind, the being. Jesus therefore asks his potential disciples to follow his own path, placing God and Himself in the first place and joining Him on the emblematic journey to Jerusalem.

*2. Embracing the “Cross”*

From the perspective of Jerusalem, it is understandable why Jesus continues his teaching with the recommendation to carry one’s “own cross”. Understandably, the model image here remains the way of the Cross that Jesus supported. The “cross”, therefore, indicates all the difficulties, adversities, persecutions in the journey of life and mission for the Kingdom of God to be lived with Jesus and like Jesus. So much so that Jesus spoke of the “everyday cross” in the life of those who follow Him: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23)

The perspective of the “cross” starts from and is inserted into the mystery of the Cross of Christ for the salvation of the world. In reality, it is the wisdom of God which appears to be madness, a great folly for the world, as Saint Paul well explained (cf. 1Cor 1:18-31). Thus, the discourse of the cross that Jesus now offers to his potential followers certainly does not come from earthly reasoning, but from heavenly reasoning. In other words, it comes from God in Christ for a true wisdom with which, in the expressions of the book of Wisdom, “people learned what pleases you [to God]”, and “were saved by Wisdom.” (Wis 9:18b) Thus, every time a disciple carries his “cross” with and in Christ, he/she also carries out his/her mission for the salvation of the whole world.

*3. God’s Wisdom versus Human Wisdom: The Divine Wisdom Perspective*

The instructions of Jesus today therefore reveal a divine wisdom that has shown itself to be particularly different from human wisdom and in contrast with it. They therefore also require a wise calculation, as Jesus also recommended with the two parables, that of the construction of the tower and that of the king who goes to war. We must always reason, always reflect on the forces available to face the “task” of being a disciple of Jesus in the so arduous and noble mission of bringing the Gospel of God to the whole world and to every place where we live. However, these are calculations that must obviously be made not according to human reasonings, but divine (because effectively “the deliberations of mortals are timid, and uncertain our plans,” due to “a corruptible body” and “a mind full of worries”; cf. Wis 9:14-15). One must therefore keep in mind the “divine paradoxes” that Jesus affirmed: “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mk 8:35), as well as “everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life.” (Mt 19:29)

Wisdom therefore in the disciple’s journey always consists in making oneself humble before God, as we learned last week, and in placing faith, trust and strength not so much in one’s own limited human wisdom, but in Jesus and His words, because He alone “has the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68), as Saint Peter professed, and because, as Saint Paul affirmed from his experience as a missionary disciple: “I can do everything in Him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13). And so be it. Amen!

*Useful points to consider:*

**POPE FRANCIS, *GENERAL AUDIENCE*, *St. Peter’s Square*, *Wednesday, 9 April 2014***

1. The first gift of the Holy Spirit (…) is therefore *wisdom*. But it is not simply human wisdom, which is the fruit of knowledge and experience. In the Bible we are told that Solomon, at the time of his coronation as King of Israel, had asked for the gift of wisdom (cf. 1 Kings 3:9). And wisdom is precisely this: it is the grace of being able *to see everything with the eyes of God*. It is simply this: it is to see the world, to see situations, circumstances, problems, everything through God’s eyes. This is wisdom. Sometimes we see things according to our liking or according to the condition of our heart, with love or with hate, with envy.... No, this is not God’s perspective. Wisdom is what the Holy Spirit works in us so as to enable us to see things with the eyes of God. This is the gift of wisdom.

2. And obviously this comes from *intimacy with God*, from the intimate relationship we have with God, from the relationship children have with their Father. And when we have this relationship, the Holy Spirit endows us with the gift of wisdom. When we are in communion with the Lord, the Holy Spirit transfigures our heart and enables it to perceive all of his warmth and predilection.

3. The Holy Spirit thus makes the Christian “wise”. Not in the sense that he has an answer for everything, that he knows everything, but in the sense that he “*knows*” *about God*, he knows how God acts, he knows when something is of God and when it is not of God; he has this wisdom which God places in our hearts.

The heart of the wise man in this sense has a*taste and savour* for God. And how important it is that there be Christians like this in our communities! Everything in them speaks of God and becomes a beautiful and living sign of his presence and of his love. And this is something that we cannot invent, that we cannot obtain by ourselves: it is a gift that God gives to those who make themselves docile to the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit within us, in our heart; we can listen to him, we can listen to him. If we listen to the Holy Spirit, he teaches us this way of wisdom, he endows us with wisdom, which is seeing with God’s eyes, hearing with God’s ears, loving with God’s heart, directing things with God’s judgement. This is the wisdom the Holy Spirit endows us with, and we can all have it. We only have to ask it of the Holy Spirit.

(…)Therefore, we must ask the Lord to grant us the Holy Spirit and to grant us the gift of *wisdom*, that *wisdom of God*that teaches us to see with God’s eyes, to feel with God’s heart, to speak with God’s words. And so, with this wisdom, let us go forward, let us build our family, let us build the Church, and we will all be sanctified. Today let us ask for this grace of wisdom. And let us ask Our Lady, who is the Seat of Wisdom, for this gift: may she give us this grace.