

Today's readings challenge us to the true Christian discipleship of total commitment to the will of God, putting God first in our lives.

The first reading, taken from the Book of Wisdom, instructs us to ask for the gifts of discernment and strength from the Holy Spirit so that we may do the will of God as His true disciples. The second reading, taken from St. Paul's letter to Philemon, teaches us that detachment and renunciation are necessary for a true disciple of Christ. As a responsible Apostle and zealous disciple of Christ, Paul had to renounce the service of his new helper, Onesimus, and return him to his master. As a new disciple of Christ, Onesimus had to leave Paul, face his owner as a runaway slave, and accept the consequences.

Today's Gospel reminds us to count the cost of being a disciple and follower of Christ because the cost is high: true Christian discipleship requires one to "renounce" both earthly possessions and possessions of the heart (i.e., one's relationships). Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he would be crucified. But the crowd thought that he was going to Jerusalem to oust the Romans and to reestablish the old Davidic kingdom of Israel. Jesus was enormously popular with the crowds as a great healer, brave teacher and miracle worker. Looking at the cheering masses, however, Jesus frankly put before them the strenuous conditions for discipleship:

Jesus lays out four conditions for true Christian discipleship. 1) Renounce too much attachment to family, giving priority to God and His commandments. 2) Break off the excessive attachment to possessions by leading a detached life, willingly sharing one's blessings with others. 3) Be ready to carry the cross and follow Jesus by i) gracefully accepting and lovingly offering our pains and suffering with Jesus on the cross for the salvation of all of us ii) sharing our blessings sacrificially with others iii) accepting the pain involved in controlling our evil habits and tendencies and iv) by welcoming the pain and humiliation we suffer in professing our faith in public and in practicing it in daily life, standing with Jesus, his ideas and ideals. 4) Calculate the cost involved in following Jesus.

Using the two parables of the tower-builder and the king defending his country, Jesus says we must think long and hard about Christian discipleship before we commit ourselves to Jesus in this full, life-long surrender.

We need to accept the challenge of Christian discipleship with heroic commitment and practice it. We do so: 1) by daily recharging our spiritual batteries through prayer, i.e., by talking to God, and by listening to Him through our meditative reading and study of the Bible; 2) by sharing in God's life through frequent and active participation in the Eucharistic celebration; 3) by practicing the spirit of detachment and the renunciation of evil habits; 4) by giving our time, talents and resources generously, for the Lord's work in the Church universal, and especially in our parish community, relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, 5) by loving all God's children, especially the less fortunate ones, through humble, selfless acts of kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and service; 6) by showing true commitment to the obligations and duties entrusted to us by our vocation in life and our profession, for example, by fidelity in marriage and firm adherence to justice in our living and profession.

We need to accept the challenge with heroic commitment: Jesus' challenge of true Christian discipleship can be accepted only if we practice the spirit of detachment and renunciation in our daily lives. Real discipleship demands true commitment to the duties entrusted to us by life, circumstances, the community, or directly by God Himself, and by loving acts of selfless, humble, sacrificial love offered to all God's children around us. Let us remember that all this is possible only if we rely on the power of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Mother Teresa said, "If we have our Lord amid us, with daily Mass and Holy Communion, I fear nothing for the Sisters nor myself; he will look after us. But without him I cannot be. I am helpless".