

# Twentythird Sunday of Ordinary Time

The Wisdom and the Cost of Discipleship

September 08, 2019

Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.

We heard in the First Reading (Wisdom 9:13-18) that true wisdom enables a person to be guided by the interests of the soul rather than those of the body. The soul is spiritual; the body, corruptible.

We are dependent on the Holy Spirit to help us make the right moral decisions and to lead us on the right path (through the “narrow gate”). We can ask the Spirit for the gift of wisdom whenever we need it. The Psalmist encourages us to pray for “wisdom of the heart” (Psalm 90:12).

Wisdom, in Christian terms, means total commitment to Jesus, to discipleship with him regardless of the cost. In the Gospel, Jesus makes this complete commitment very clear (Luke 14:25-33).

“If anyone comes to me without hating his mother and father.....he/she cannot be my disciple.” The word – hating– is a metaphor for making the priority in the Christian life the claims of Christ. All other considerations are secondary, even those of one’s family.

## Here are two examples:

**One** A college classmate of mine, Paul, came from an Italian-American family. Patriarchal. Paul went away from home to attend Santa Clara University where he majored in business. While there, he realized he had a vocation to be a Jesuit. When he went home to share this happy news with his parents he received very mixed responses: his mother was very pleased with this decision, but his father was enraged and said to Paul: “If you do this, I will never speak to you again. And I will write you out of my will!!

Paul asked himself, “Which father should I obey?” After some soul searching and after receiving some spiritual counsel from a priest friend, he decided on God the Father. His earthly father did not speak to him for eleven years! Whenever Paul went home for a visit, his father would go to another part of the house. Finally, a year before Paul’s ordination, his father relented and was present for the ceremony.

Two. My father was a very successful food broker in Los Angeles County. When I announced to him (my mother had already gone to God) that I had decided to apply to the Jesuits he said to me, "If you are happy, so am I." However, his expectation of what I would be doing as a Jesuit would be to teach in one of our prestigious high schools or universities. Turns out God had other plans for me; they started five years after I entered the Novitiate and five years before I was ordained.

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I was missioned to a diocesan parish in the middle of an inner-city African-American neighborhood, in San Francisco, and this during the civil rights era. There I set up a program to get job interviews for Black men who were unemployed. My dad grew up in the same city, but in a completely different kind of neighborhood; he knew about the area where I was and it "freaked him out" that I was living there.

Later, after I was ordained, I was appointed Director of Social Ministries for the then California Province. This ministry had to do with promoting issues of social justice to both Jesuits and the general public. This also did not sit well with my father, especially when one of the issues I promoted was a boycott of Nestle's Infant Formula that they were selling in Third-World countries; the product was harming not helping babies. Turns out one of my dad's customers was Nestles!

Similar to Paul, I had to decide which "father" I was going to follow, whose interests I was going to support. I chose God, which did cause some tension between my father and me at times, but it did not ruin our relationship.

Neither Paul's nor my decisions were easy to make. The cross was there for both of us- and for both of our fathers. Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry his/her own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

What are the crosses you have had to carry? Do carry?  
Whose expectations did you have to go against in order to follow Jesus more closely?

**"Carrying one's cross"** – it is not suffering for its own sake; we are not being asked to be masochists. It is the suffering entailed in following the Lord. It is living his values even at the risk of being "persecuted" for it. Modern versions of being persecuted could be the risk to our body, but also being on the receiving end of disapproval, being put down, being rejected, being ridiculed, or being ignored.

## **CONCLUSION**

I end these reflections with two 'pearls' of wisdom.

"Are you good for the wood?" – the wood of the cross

"If God brings you to it (whatever "it" is), he will bring you through it."

**AMEN.**

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