

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 119:135

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Let your face shine upon your servant;
and teach me your laws.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Luke 14:25-33; L129C

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus,
and he turned and addressed them,

“If anyone comes to me with-
out hating his father and
mother,

wife and children, brothers and
sisters,

and even his own life,
he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not carry his
own cross and come after me
cannot be my disciple.

Which of you wishing to construct a
tower
does not first sit down and calculate
the cost
to see if there is enough for its
completion?

Otherwise, after laying the foundation
and finding himself unable to finish the
work

the onlookers should laugh at him and
say,

‘This one began to build but did not
have the resources to finish.’

Or what king marching into battle would
not first sit down
and decide whether with ten thousand
troops

he can successfully oppose another
king

advancing upon him with twenty thou-
sand troops?

But if not, while he is still far away,
he will send a delegation to ask for
peace terms.

In the same way,
anyone of you who does not renounce
all his possessions
cannot be my disciple.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Hyperbole and exaggeration can be effective rhetorical tools. They are used by almost everyone at some point. Even the fictitious news announcer Kent Brockman from the Simpsons said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve been to Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and I can say without hyperbole that this is a million times worse than all of them put together.”

Of course, it’s easy to spot hyperbole and we don’t take it literally. But sometimes it’s easy to miss this rhetorical tool when it’s on the lips of Jesus in the Scriptures. A good rule of thumb is to see how the early Christians understood a passage in question. For example, Jesus advises his listeners in another story that “if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out” (Matt 18:9; NABRE)! But early, as well as later Christians, did not take that literally. The passage is rhetorical hyperbole. Something similar is at work in today’s gospel passage when Jesus says that no one coming to him “without hating his father and mother, / wife and children, brothers and sisters, / and even his own life” can be a disciple. Rather than try to twist ourselves into knots over that quote, it’s best to recognize it for what it is: rhetorical hyperbole. Even one of the concluding thoughts about renouncing all possessions is hyperbolic. Part of the reason we know this is by reading other passages in Luke in which Jesus’ women followers provide for Jesus and the disciples from their means (Luke 8:1-3). So even Jesus did not expect his own followers to take this advice about renouncing all possessions literally. If they had, he would not have had such a widespread support network in Judea and Galilee.

Jesus is an effective preacher: he used the rhetorical tools of hyperbole and exaggeration to make his point. This can be a challenge for us if we want to take literally each and every saying of his in the New Testament. But gratefully we are part of a long line of believers, a large family of faith. And we can look to ancient Christians to see that they recognized this as hyperbole too.

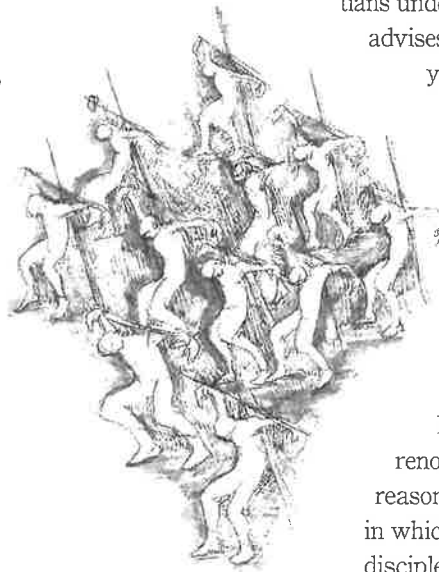
In the end, what Jesus demands is a wholehearted, complete commitment, without distraction. And that’s no exaggeration.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Discipleship is a lifelong process, often called a journey. We learn things along the way, likely starting out resolutely as Jesus does on his own journey to Jerusalem. During this lifelong process we encounter different ways of looking at reality, new insights, challenging statements, and more. The metaphor of a journey is especially apt as we never stay still, nor does our environment or the people around us. We are all growing in knowledge, understanding, and experience with former ways of understanding giving way to the new.

Developmentally, human beings tend to grow from a place of literalism to understanding the broader picture. Children can be told not to touch the stove, but as they mature they internalize the lesson and take care around a hot stove.

Discipleship follows a similar path. We tend to be more literal in the early stages of a relationship with Christ, but as we mature we see the deeper mean-



ing of his injunctions and exhortations. Let us continue on this path to an adult relationship with Christ.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me / cannot be my disciple.

To the point: This phrase appears in all three of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew (10:38, 16:24) and Luke (9:23, 14:27) repeat it twice, and Mark once (8:34). It's hard to imagine the pre-crucifixion Jesus uttering these words. What would they have meant to the crowd that was following him? Looking back from two thousand years after the event, we know Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he will literally carry his own cross and then be crucified upon it. The spiritual life requires struggle and sacrifice. But we also know the end of the story: life everlasting.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first and second readings: The sayings in today's gospel are demanding. Following Jesus requires single-minded dedication. The book of Wisdom reminds us how difficult it can be to follow the dictates of God. The author asks, "[W]ho can conceive what the LORD intends?" Interpreting biblical texts requires an expansive mind. We cannot focus on one line in the Bible to the exclusion of everything else. Otherwise, lines like, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, / wife and children, brothers and sisters, / and even his own life, / he cannot be my disciple," could lead us to renounce the wisdom of Jesus completely. In the second reading St. Paul writes to Philemon requesting that Philemon receive back his former (possibly runaway) slave with love and equality, "that you might have him back for ever, / no longer as a slave / but more than a slave, a brother, / beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, / as a man and in the Lord."

to experience: We know that the basis of Christianity is love: love of God and love of others. Interpreted through this lens today's shocking gospel helps us to put our lives in perspective. Jesus, the source of love and peace, must be at the center of all that we do.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's psalm also reminds us to put our lives in perspective. To us, our days and years upon the earth might stretch out, but in the vast expanse of the history of salvation they are less than the blink of an eye. The psalmist prays, "Teach us to number our days aright, / that we may gain wisdom of heart." Though fleeting, our earthly lives are not futile. We are given a work to do. Jesus urges us to take up our cross and follow him, while the psalmist asks God to "prosper the work of our hands!"

to psalmist preparation: In the assembly of the faithful, your work of leading the community in song and prayer is service to the people of God. How might you pray this week for God to "prosper" your ministry and to bless the work of your hands?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

The writer of the book of Wisdom asks, "[W]ho can conceive what the LORD intends?" If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

The psalmist prays twice, "[P]rosper the work of our hands!" Of the many things you do, what work or labor would you like to ask God's blessing on?

What cross are you being asked to carry right now? Are there crosses you have been struggling with that are not yours to carry?

The last line of today's gospel asks us to renounce our possessions in order to be Jesus' disciples. Is there a possession that does not lead to fullness of life that God might be calling for you to renounce?