



Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

† Sunday 8th September 2019

In England and Wales: Prayer for Education, Teachers and Students

Keynote: Jesus teaches that dedication and wisdom mark the true disciple

Book of Wisdom 9: 13-18

We speak of the 'wisdom of Solomon' – surely one of the great rulers of ancient times! Here we have part of Solomon's prayer for divine wisdom: '*what man can know the intentions of God...? The reasonings of mortals are unsure... It is hard enough for us to work out what is on earth, laborious to know what lies within our reach, who, then, can discover what is in the heavens?*' Despite human justified pride in our knowledge of science and the things of our modern world, true wisdom is much harder to come by; the person who is really wise will also admit with humility, '*As for God's intention, who could have learnt it, had God not granted Wisdom, and sent the Holy Spirit from above?*' For while we may marvel at the wonders of creation, and God's wisdom that fills all the earth, we do not ourselves truly master anything without true wisdom.

Responsorial Psalm 89 (90) – a song recognising God's protection

Letter of Paul to Philemon 1: 9-10, 12-17

'*This is Paul writing, an old man now and, what is more, still a prisoner,*' these words come from a short personal letter addressed to Philemon and his family. Onesimus – the slave – had run away from his master, and somehow found his way to Rome and came to help Paul in prison. Now Paul is sending the slave – who in the meantime, has become a Christian – back to his master's household. This personal letter has a message for us all. Christ has turned the values of the ancient world on their head, and maybe our values too! Christians today are appalled by the practice of slavery, whether in past times or even today, but in Paul's day slavery was the harsh but normal reality of life. The 'runaway' would expect to be severely punished but Onesimus has been given spiritual freedom in Christian faith and baptism. Paul appeals then to his friend Philemon, that instead of punishing his slave for running away, he '*could have him back for ever, not as slave any more, but something much better than a slave, a dear brother as well as a brother in the Lord... welcome him as you would welcome me,*' concludes Paul who himself, is in chains in a Roman prison under sentence of death.

Gospel according to Luke 14: 25-33

Jesus demands total commitment from his 'disciples' and puts it in a stark way. Jesus says, '*If any man comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.*' Then follow two parables, which concentrate on the need for wise reflection before taking important decisions. Deciding to be a disciple of Jesus is an important and weighty matter. '*Which of you here?*' asks Jesus, '*intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if you had enough to complete it...? Otherwise, if... he found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him.*' The point seems to be not only that we need to be wise in our preparations before undertaking a task, but more importantly, as Christ's disciples, we must be prepared to follow Jesus through to the very end with that total commitment Jesus referred to earlier – to be prepared to sacrifice everything, for as Jesus says, '*None of you can be my disciple unless you give up all your possessions.*'