

FIRST READING: Wisdom 9:13-18b

A reading from the Book of Wisdom:

Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans. For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. And scarce do we guess the things on earth, and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty; but when things are in heaven, who can search them out? Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high? And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14-17

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

You turn man back to dust, saying, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in your sight are as yesterday, now that it is past, or as a watch of the night.

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

You make an end of them in their sleep; the next morning they are like the changing grass, Which at dawn springs up anew, but by evening wilts and fades.

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

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!

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

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days. And may the gracious care of the Lord our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us! Prosper the work of our hands!

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

SECOND READING: Philemon 9-10, 12-17

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to Philemon:

I, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus, urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment; I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel, but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary. Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 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. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 14:25-33

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

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

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 23rd Sunday of the Year C

When Jesus taught us to pray his prayer, the Our Father, We pray, "Thy will be done." The reading, this morning, from Wisdom has posed a problem. How can we know God's will? The author has asked the question in another way, "Who can know God's mind?" We discern God's will and what God wants of us. How does discernment happen? I like to point out that none of us knows our own minds completely let alone the mind of another especially God's mind. For us, alone, we cannot discern what's on God's mind. However, on Pentecost the Church received the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to discern God's will. We also have the scriptures which is God's Word. God's Word is Jesus.

We have just read today's scriptures. In them is God's Word and with the grace of the Spirit, with whom we hear the Word, we can find meaning for our lives. When these readings make sense to us and when they touch our lives, we experience the message of this passage from Wisdom come to reality. They do this by God's grace. In answer to Wisdom's initial question, we can know God's mind and will through God's gift of grace. We are people who seek to know what God wants of us. We know God's will by the grace of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We discern when we pray, seek the Spirit's direction and even when we ask the advice of others. God's grace can be an inspiration, insight through scripture and in the voices of the people who give us advice.

The second reading has a context. The letter to Philemon is the only personal letter we have written by Paul. Philemon was an individual, not a community. Onesimus was Philemon's slave who ran away. His name means Useful. Perhaps with that name, he was born into slavery. He had served Paul while he was imprisoned for Christ. During that time serving Paul, he came to faith and was Baptized. Paul wrote to Philemon to plead for mercy on Onesimus' behalf. He was to Philemon no longer just a slave but now also a brother in Christ. Paul has sought reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus. Paul could not change Onesimus' situation; he was still a runaway slave. Paul, instead, transformed the relationship and made him, a fellow believer, member of the Church and a brother in Christ.

This is not a story to end Onesimus' slavery. Paul was attempting to seek mercy for running away. Paul, as an apostle, could have ordered Philemon, a faithful Christian, to relent but instead opted to appeal to Philemon's Christian faith to choose mercy for a brother in Faith. Paul has said that in Christ there is no east or west, no Greek or Jew, and no slave no free. All are one in Christ. Paul's approach in this situation has relevance to us as we become one parish. It is our faith in Jesus that makes us one Church as we form a new Parish, soon to have a name. We do not know what happened between Philemon and Onesimus. These were people of faith as we are. Our faith guides us to strive for unity as a new parish. Perhaps as a man of faith, Philemon accepted his slave Onesimus back with open arms.

Luke's gospel spoke of the cost of discipleship. It is not easy, all the time, to follow Jesus. The early Church experienced persecution. Individual members experienced ostracization from their families and from their synagogues. Given this, why did Jesus tell his followers to hate people, especially family? Wasn't Jesus all about love? Why did he want his followers to renounce all their possessions? What was Jesus actually asking them to do? Remember, Jesus is also asking us to do the same. Jesus was a first century Palestinian Jewish man. He was proposing that his followers follow him and become his family that after Easter and Pentecost would become the Church.

The family was most important in Jesus' culture. An entire village could be made up of the members of one family. Sons followed their fathers into the family business and took it over when the old man died. This would happen generation after generation. Jesus proposed a life and a commitment that was new and different. Hate can also be translated as turning one's back on one's family to embark on a life in nascent Christianity. Not everyone could do it; hence the story of the tower and battle. Persist; don't give up on life in Christ is Jesus' message. When people would leave their family to join with Jesus, they gave up their livelihoods, home and inheritance. In joining with Jesus, his followers became his beloved family. The community held all things in common.

I also point out that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He was on his way to fulfill his mission which was his cross, death and resurrection. His mission had a personal cost to him as well. It would claim his life. He offered his life for ours. He would rise and give us the promise of eternal life. The cross was Jesus' mission. When Jesus has told us to take up our cross in life, he's asked us to take up our mission to live our faith in Christ. It's not our suffering that Jesus

has asked us to embrace but our Christian witness. Jesus suffered to heal and forgive us. He took on our pain so that we could live new life in his name.

We, at Divine Savior cannot hate or turn our backs on our history, relationships or experience here. We are only human and can never forget who we are and what Divine Savior has been. It has been our community, our parish and our home. Jesus is in our hearts and is the heart of our community. Jesus does not want us to turn our backs on who we are and what we've been but to embrace who we are and celebrate our future. If we embrace our cross and follow in Jesus' steps, they will lead to a new parish. We will be one step closer to the Kingdom of God.

When we end mass today, I will remove the heart of our parish, the Eucharist from the tabernacle and carry Jesus via car to St. Eugene. I invite you to drive there, too, where we will meet in church for a short service. I will entrust the Eucharist to Fr. Yanos who will place it into St. Eugene's tabernacle. A brief prayer service will conclude as Divine Savior closes as a site for our new parish's worship. I thank and bless you all.

May God continue the work begun in us.

James D. Beath
September 4, 2022

PS: I will not use this one for Sunday. I have written another, more personal message to give instead.