

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS”

23rd SUNDAY -C- *September 7, 2025*

Wisdom 9: 13-18; Psalm 90; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14: 25-33

by **Jude Siciliano**, OP

Dear Preachers:

I will be tempted to apologize to the congregation this Sunday after reading this gospel passage. What a “turn-off” it seems, with its talk of “hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even [your] own life.” Then it goes on to say that unless we “renounce all [our] possessions,” we cannot be Jesus’ disciples. On first hearing, people may wonder if Jesus came from another planet. He certainly sounds far removed from our lives—especially for those of us who work hard to love and care for our aging parents, making decisions about their needs: Should we bring them into our homes? Arrange home care? Place them in a nursing facility? We help with medications, accompany them to endless appointments, visit often, and stay in touch. So, what is Jesus talking about when he says we must “hate” our parents?

And what about “hating” spouses? (We can assume Jesus means “spouses” in general, not just wives.) In a society where nearly half of marriages end in divorce—and where dioceses and parishes work hard to support and strengthen marriages—how are married couples, or those preparing for marriage, supposed to hear such words? The list of “hatings” goes on in this passage, but you get the point. Could Jesus really mean such harsh statements? And if he does, are we truly ready to renounce all possessions to follow him? Do we know anyone who has? And if they have, who is paying their rent, feeding them, and covering their health insurance?

This is where a little research helps. Commentaries point out that the Greek word translated as “hate” does not mean rage or hostility as it does in English. Rather, it suggests a “lesser love,” or a detachment that allows one to turn away from people or things that pull us from discipleship. God calls us to love—certainly including parents, spouses, children, brothers, and sisters. Remember, Jesus told his disciples to love even their enemies. Surely he also expects us to love those closest to us. Notice, too, that right after speaking about “hating,” Jesus mentions the cross. Here, bearing the cross does not mean simply enduring life’s unavoidable hardships, but rather the pain that comes from freely choosing to follow him on the road to Jerusalem—and to suffering.

Still, Jesus is placing real demands on would-be disciples. Let's not assume his original listeners found these words any less shocking than we do. They may have been poor, but they cherished possessions too. Family life was, if anything, even more central to their identity than it is to ours. In Jesus' day, belonging to family, clan, and religious group was essential. Social standing, honor, and reputation were bound up in these networks. To walk away from family ties was, in effect, to lose one's identity.

But earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus had already described the new family he came to create: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it" (8:21; see also 11:27–28). In other words, his followers form a new family, united not by blood, but by their commitment to God's Word. This means that other ties, even those most precious to us, must become secondary. In this new family we find ourselves alongside people of every background—those with wealth and those without, the respected and the overlooked. As we heard two weeks ago: "Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." Clearly, this is not "business as usual."

Such mixing can be unsettling. I remember once walking through a prison yard with new volunteers from a nearby parish. They had given up their Sunday morning with family to worship with inmates. One volunteer looked around at the hundreds of men milling about and said, "This is really stretching me." That word—"stretching"—said it all. He was finding himself pulled beyond his comfort zone, worshiping with people he never expected to call brothers. But he returned month after month and came to speak of the inmates as "my brothers at the prison." Following Jesus had stretched him into a new world, a new family.

But Jesus warns don't take this lightly. Think it over. He compares discipleship to building a tower—are you prepared to finish the project? Or, to a king going into battle—do you have the resources to succeed? Both images—building and battle—are sobering. Building suggests a long process, often unfinished, like our own discipleship. We are still "under construction," works in progress. The battle image highlights the cost and struggle involved. Discipleship requires sacrifice and sometimes painful choices. We have already said "yes" to following Christ, but we will be asked again and again to make decisions that put our discipleship on the line—decisions that may place us at odds with family, friends, or cultural values.

Do we have the resources to stay faithful, to endure the consequences of our choices? On our own, probably not. None of us has enough wisdom or strength. And that is why we gather here, week after week: to hear the Word, to be nourished at the table, to find strength in one another. Look around—

this is our new family. We may differ in politics, wealth, or background, but here we are, called sisters and brothers in Christ. That stretches us, doesn't it? Just as Jesus said it would, when he invited us to make him the first priority in our lives.

Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/090725.cfm>

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“.. .no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me. . .”

Philemon 16

There is no doubt about it; human slavery was an accepted institution of antiquity. With the above words, Paul sends a runaway slave from Colossae back to his master, Philemon. The slave, Onesimus, was converted to Christ by Paul. But the Letter to Philemon takes a twist as Paul breathes “the spirit of Christ and of equality within the Christian community.” In doing so, Paul “voiced an idea revolutionary in that day and destined to break down worldly barriers of division ‘in the Lord’” (The Catholic Study Bible, NAB, Oxford, 1990).

Human slavery continues to exist today with a new name: it is now human trafficking, and it can be for sex and/or labor, both of which are fundamental violations of human rights. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines labor trafficking as: “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.” Sex trafficking is also a modern-day form of slavery that is recognized in the TVPA in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years.

Here in beautiful North Carolina, this modern slavery exists. We have the distinction of being the 9th most likely state in the nation to be a site for trafficking. For a state that likes to be recognized for its finest features, this is appalling (Human trafficking cases: North Carolina ranks among worst 10 states). If you would like to learn more about how to recognize signs of trafficking and what to do, check out this website: Project No Rest - Stop Human Trafficking in North Carolina

If you think you have come in contact with a victim of human trafficking, call the police if the person is in immediate danger or call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888. Locally, the Salvation Army has Project Fight if you would like to get involved: Project FIGHT.

Paul's letter serves as a reminder that in Christ we must see the actions of this world differently and pursue alternative routes to correct corrupt social structures.

Barbara Molinari Quinby, MPS, Director
Office of Human Life, Dignity, and Justice Ministries
[Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral](#), Raleigh, NC

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Gospel reading:

If you do not carry your own cross
and come after me you cannot be my disciple....
In the same way, anyone of you
who does not renounce all your
possessions cannot be my disciples.

Reflection:

Jesus tells us today that we should not enter into or take our discipleship to him too casually. We are not just members in a special social club. Nor does being a disciple happen automatically by being born into a Christian family. That's not enough. Instead, discipleship comes by our making a deliberate and life-altering choice. Before we make such a commitment we must consider it carefully and be willing to make a total gift of ourselves to him and his ways each and every day.

So, we ask ourselves:

- How does being Jesus' disciple affect my daily life in little ways?
- How does it affect the big choices I make?

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

“One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out.”

---Pope Francis

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:

Thoms Walic #0405380 (On death row since 8/9/1996)
David James #0510234 (10/2/1996)
Melvin White #0434355 (10/15/1996)

----**Central Prison**, P.O. 247, Phoenix, MD 21131

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

On this page you can sign “The National Catholic Pledge to End the Death Penalty.” Also, check the interfaith page for People of Faith Against the Death Penalty: <http://www.pfadp.org/>

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