

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 9, 2007

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

Homily: *S. Benilda Desmond, O.P.*

Today's readings invite us to contemplate the mystery of the wisdom of God. In our decision-making we often encounter the harsh reality of how demanding is the Christian law of love. As the passage from Wisdom tells us: "the deliberations of mortals are timid. For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns."

The Gospel reading from Luke is one of the most challenging of the New Testament. Luke makes clear in the Gospel that no other love can come between the disciples' commitment to Jesus and his teaching on loving one's enemies, on forgiveness, compassion and mercy. The evangelist even uses the Hebrew literary form of exaggeration to make his point: One cannot really be a disciple of Jesus unless he hates father and mother. One thinks of the young wife pressured for an abortion by the one she loves and trusts, or infuriated mobs stampeded to revenge killings of the innocent by the assassination of a beloved leader. How difficult it is for a parent to surrender a drug addicted and delinquent child to the authorities who can help him, when the child may interpret this as betrayal.

St. Paul's beautiful letter to Philemon in the second reading illustrates the need for wisdom in dealing with the tense relationships that can develop in a pagan society with unjust political and social structures. Paul explains that he is sending back to Philemon his runaway slave, Onesimus, whom Paul has converted to Christ while in prison.

He implores Philemon to treat his slave as he would treat Paul himself : that Philemon "might have Onesimus back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to Paul, but even more so to you, Philemon, as a man and in the Lord."

Throughout his ministry Jesus challenged his followers to live a life of love. He was fearless in putting forward teachings on the forgiveness of sinners and on the compassion that God offered to those who broke the laws of fasting and Sabbath rest. This infuriated his enemies and strengthened them in their determination to kill him. In our own day, modern disciples of Jesus will be challenged as they make decisions about forgiveness and courage in their own relationships. It is in the community of love that gathers around the Eucharist each Sunday that we will find the wisdom and the courage to follow the way of the Lord.