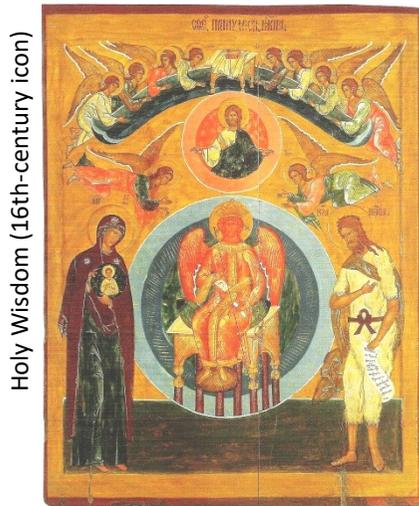


PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

First Reading Wisdom 9: 13–18



Holy Wisdom (16th-century icon)

This week's first reading is an extract from the book of Wisdom, sometimes also called the Wisdom of Solomon. However, Solomon did not write it and its anonymous author seems to have been a learned Jew with a good knowledge of the Greek language and culture. Scholars think it was written during the 1st century BC, thus making it the last book of the Old Testament.

Wisdom was written in Greek (not Hebrew) in Alexandria in Egypt.

This was the intellectual and

scientific centre of the Mediterranean world with a large Jewish population. Its readership probably consisted of Jewish students or intellectuals of a similar background to that of the author.

Jews, at that time, were torn between their traditional beliefs and religious practices and the Hellenistic culture. There was dissension, and many were abandoning their original religion.

The book of Wisdom tried to bridge the gap between the two cultures leading to a philosophy of living righteously. At its core was Lady Wisdom, a personified virtue who knew the mind of God.

Today's reading follows Solomon's prayer for wisdom to carry out his office: *'God of our ancestors ... grant me wisdom ... for I am your servant ... with small understanding of justice and the laws'* (Wisdom 9: 1,4–5)

Life is *'unsure ... unstable'*, so only the help of Wisdom can make straight the paths, leading people to behaving in ways that will please God.

Luke 14: 25–33 The cost of discipleship

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way

Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem. With hindsight, we know this would lead him to the cross. Many of those travelling with him did not know where he was going; they were simply following him enthusiastically. Jesus knew what was awaiting him and that life would not be easy for his disciples. He used vivid language to illustrate the gravity of this calling, one requiring total commitment.

If anyone comes to me without hating his father ...

When Jesus speaks of hating one's own family he is not contradicting what he has previously taught: i.e. that we are to love everyone, even our enemies (Luke 6: 27). Rather, this was a Semitic way of underlining priorities. A comparison of extremes is used, with hatred implying a lesser degree of love.

Anyone who does not carry his cross, cannot be a disciple.

The normal Jewish method of execution was stoning, whereas crucifixion was a Roman punishment and a familiar sight in Palestine. The crowd following Jesus would therefore understand what his words meant: i.e. discipleship would put them at odds with the Law and might even lead to death.

The two parables

Jesus uses these stories to explain further what is needed of his would-be disciples. He wants them to understand that following him is a way of life that needs to be carefully considered. It is not a passing fancy, brought on by a sudden burst of enthusiasm. The two examples Jesus gives respectively relate to private and political matters. In each situation, careful thought is needed before rushing into action. Jesus wants the people who are following him to Jerusalem to count the cost and so be able to finish what they have started.

None of you can be my disciples unless you give up all your possessions

Jesus summarises the conditions he has laid down for true discipleship. These require detachment from anything that will deter people from making a wholehearted commitment to him and his values.

