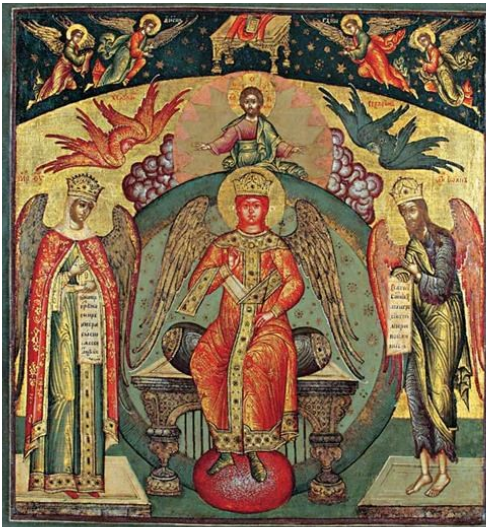


## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

#### First Reading Wisdom 9: 13–18

Today's reading comes from the Book of Wisdom. This is perhaps the latest book of the Old Testament, written not long before the birth of Jesus (some estimate between c. 100 and 50 BC). Although the claim for Solomon's own authorship is unfounded, the text echoes the great Jewish tradition of wisdom that arose with Solomon.



Russian Icon of Holy Wisdom, c.1670

The Book of Wisdom reflects Greek tradition and culture: it was written in Greek (rather than Hebrew), perhaps by Greek-speaking Jews who had settled in Alexandria in Egypt, the intellectual and scientific centre of the Mediterranean world. Its readership probably consisted of Jewish students or intellectuals: Jews of that time were torn between their traditional beliefs and religious practices, and modern Hellenistic culture. There was dissension, and many were abandoning their original religion.

The Book of Wisdom tries to bridge the gap between these two cultures, leading to a philosophy of living righteously. God is indeed in charge of the world, and the text proclaims a belief in personal immortality. At its core is 'Lady Wisdom', a personified virtue who knows the mind of God.

Today's verses come from the second part of the book, a rich meditation on divine wisdom. They follow the writer's praise of and prayer for wisdom, for this is the virtue that he seeks 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 behave in ways that will please God.

## Luke 14: 25–33 The cost of discipleship

### Great crowds accompanied Jesus

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 uses vivid language to illustrate the gravity of this calling, one requiring total commitment.

### **'If anyone comes to me and does not hate their own father ...'**

When Jesus speaks of hating one's own family he is not contradicting what he has previously taught: 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.

### **'Whoever does not bear their own cross ... cannot be my 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.



### **'Any one of you who does not renounce all that they have cannot be my disciple ...'**

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.