

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY [C]

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

And here I thought “gospel” meant “good news”?!

Wow – we just heard some of the harshest words we every will hear in the entire Bible. What did Jesus say?

“If any one 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” (Luke 14:26).

This is nothing short of shocking – hating? Hating my mother and father and children?

Aren’t we required to *love* our enemies? Aren’t we told to *love* our neighbor as our self? Doesn’t Jesus command us to *love* one another?

So, then, how in the name of heaven are we to make sense of what we heard in today’s Gospel?

As is always the case, the key to understanding a verse – even a really tough verse – is found in the *context*. The key to understanding this shocking statement of Our Lord is found at the end of today’s Gospel when Jesus says:

“Every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Friends, since we first could hear, we’ve been bombarded by a “world view” that relentlessly tells us our happiness is connected with our possessions.

Stated negatively, the “world view” shouts we are not happy because we do not have everything you want. We know well the “world view” litany which warns us that we only can find happiness when:

- When we’ve got that much money
- When we’ve got that big of a house
- When we have that loving of a family
- When we receive more recognition and respect

According to the “world view” life is a constant quest to get, to acquire, to obtain and to accumulate possessions.

We always need more, we never have enough.

Friends, we have everything we need right here, right now, to be happy. Now, you may exclaim, “Father, you don’t understand my situation!” Really?

Unhappiness happens when I am living life to get that money, to get that house, to get that person, to get that recognition. While the “world view” announces a formula for happiness, it delivers disappointment and misery.

In contrast, there is the “biblical view” in which happiness is found when I stop being the center of things – when I leave behind my pride and my desires for the well-being of another.

For sure, the hard-wired “world view” programming is hard to overcome. Our entire lives we have heard “you have to get this” and “you have to get that.” Time and again we are craving possessions believing the lie that when these self-desires are met I finally will be happy.

Think for a moment of a time when you were most unhappy. I’ll be honest – for me, my most unhappy moments were marked by selfish brooding over possessions I didn’t have and thought I deserved.

Friends, turn off the “world view” programming that is making you miserable! Instead of selfish brooding over what isn’t in your life:

- Write a note to someone
- Make cookies for kids in the neighborhood
- Donate money to a charity
- Take time to visit a home bound person or nursing home
- Say a prayer for someone in need

Recall the “biblical view” of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta who teaches us that we do not need to do great things but rather to do small and ordinary things with great *love*!

- *Love* is the great act of dis-possessing.
- *Love* is a giving away – not a taking
- *Love* is a letting go – not an acquiring.

Now, let’s return to the shocking words of Jesus we heard in the beginning of today’s Gospel.

Jesus is warning us that even family relationships can be polluted and ruined by “world view” programming.

In the measure you have made your *mother and father a possession* – something to demand, something to get, something to obtain, something to acquire – stop it!

When mom and dad are only means to your selfish end – you must hate such selfishness.

In the measure you have made your children a possession – something to demand, something to get, something to obtain, something to acquire – stop it.

- Father's forcing unfulfilled dreams to be lived by their children.
- Mother's parading children for all to see and admire.

You must renounce such selfishness.

In the measure you have made your spouse a possession – something to demand, something to get, something to obtain, something to acquire – stop it right now.

- When the marriage no longer is a bond of love and mutual self-giving, when the husband uses the wife and the wife uses the husband.

You must stop such selfishness.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus wants us to be happy. The path to happiness is *dis-possession*. Happiness is found and only found when we really dare to *love*.