

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Scriptures Wisdom 9:13-18b; Psalm 90: 3-4; 5-6; 12-13; 14 and 17; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14-25-33

Hi! A simple greeting we use many times in the course of a week, if not in one day. There are other simple greetings people use, especially at the beginning of correspondence. But, we all know, Saint Paul is not one to write simple greetings. We just need to look at the opening of his letter to Philemon we just heard today. I am an old man, he writes, in this opening sentence that is forty-one words long not only in our English translation, but also forty-one words long in the original Greek.

In this letter, Saint Paul is asking his friend, Philemon, to make a choice. Onesimus was Philemon's slave and he has been helping Paul out while he is in prison. Paul is now sending him back to his master and Paul is asking Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as if he were Paul himself. Now, Paul is not a slave; Paul is a Roman citizen. Slavery was totally legal, and Paul knew that. Philemon is asked to make a choice, a radical choice for his time, a radical choice for his faith.

Hyper! Some people would get hyper when presented with Philemon's choice or any similar choice. G.K. Chesterton is supposed to have said that Christianity is a faith that comforts the afflicted...and afflicts the comfortable.

If we want to know what God wants, we can get very uncomfortable. We may be uncomfortable because we do not hear what God is telling us. We also may be uncomfortable because we hear God speaking in ways we do not expect and we wonder if that is really God speaking, especially if what God is saying is not what we want to hear. We also may be uncomfortable because we hear God speaking and we feel unequipped.

This is when our discomfort or fear must be replaced with fear of the Lord. This is why the inspired Word of God includes this reading from the Book of Wisdom. Read it again after Mass before you leave church, or when you get home. For now, remember, it began, "Who can know God's counsel..." and ended, "And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight." And our choice is to listen to God or to ignore Him, however He chooses to speak to us.

Hyperbole! This is an exaggerated statement or claim not meant to be taken literally. In today's Gospel passage Jesus tells us we must hate our relatives. Some people would say this must be a hyperbole. There is a better explanation to this use of language. In ancient Palestine, figures of speech were often vivid. The more important the point, the more vivid the image. Today's gospel is not a divine license to hate our brother and sisters. Christ means that unless we choose to love Him more than we love our families, we can't really follow Him.

This past week, a natural phenomenon made a rather long “Hi” to our brothers and sisters in the Bahamas and the Southeastern United States. Unlike Saint Paul’s long greeting, it was not a very blessed greeting. Those afflicted need us Christians to comfort them; we need to afflict ourselves in our relative comfort. Their situation is hyper-sensitive. It is not hyperbole to say in many cases they have lost everything. We are a blessed people at Nativity of the Lord Jesus. As Father Kowalec has begun to point out in the bulletin, we need to be good stewards of what we have, and we need to increase our Offertory collection to maintain the parish and provide for our future. There is a campaign that will begin next month to help assure this good work.

We also do not live on an island. We have a history of loving outreach. Our greatest second collection ever was in response to Hurricane Katrina and we followed that with additional help for Sacred Heart Parish in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Our greatest collection for Catholic Relief Services was for the response to the tsunami that hit Haiti where Sister Suzanne’s Sisters of the Humility of Mary minister. Hurricane Dorian slowly moved over the Bahamas, staying over Grand Bahama island for virtually twenty-four hours, destroying people’s lives. In the past, second collections have been the norm for the response to major natural disasters. However, this time Bishop Perez and The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have taken a different approach.

Here is what Bishop Perez has said, “As Hurricane Dorian continues to churn off the southeastern coast of the United States, bringing with it heavy wind and rain, we are stunned by heartbreaking images of the devastation left in the hurricane’s wake in the Bahamas. We pray for those who lost their lives and for those who must now try to rebuild their shattered island homes. We also pray for people in our own country who are experiencing the effects of the hurricane. May the God of all goodness keep those on the coast free from all harm and safe from the storm.

“As we pray, please consider taking action to help our brothers and sisters in the Bahamas by donating to the hurricane relief effort sponsored by Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities USA.” You can find links to each of these on the Diocese of Cleveland or the USCCB web sites. Or, if you wish, you may make out your check to either Catholic Relief Services or Catholic Charities USA and put it in our collection basket and I will make sure it is forwarded to the proper organization. These donations will not be recorded as parish donations and checks should not be made payable to the parish. Please be generous, generous in addition to considering the needs of our own parish.

Please go back to my suggestion to reread the first reading of today’s liturgy from the Book of Wisdom. How is God speaking to you? What choices can you make based on God’s words, God’s shouts, God’s songs, or God’s whisperings?

Hi! Hyper! Hyperbole!

We greet and pay attention to what the greeter is saying to us, especially when God is greeting us. We get excited, sometimes excited and afflicted and sometimes excited to afflict the comfortable – about God and what is happening and excited about what needs to happen. We exaggerate to describe God at work and to describe our response, the need to take up our cross and the struggle to take up our cross.

Such exaggeration is OK. God's work cannot be overstated, it is infinite, beyond measure. Our response may sound overstated, but within God's measure, it is finite and needs to expand. Our taking up our cross, and our struggles may sound overstated, but our cross is light and we are short of carrying the cross of Christ and no matter how much we exaggerate, we are not yet at the point of describing our carrying His cross. But, excited we must be to be disciples of the One who first carried the cross for us.