

23rd Sunday of the Year (C)
(Wisdom 9:13-18 / Luke 14:25-33)
07.09.2025
To sit down and consider...

Centuries before Jesus' words heard in today's Gospel reading, the prophet Isaiah declared: "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight." (5:21) The man who intended to build a tower and failed to do it and the king who marched to war without considering the strength of his enemy had not pondered Isaiah's warning and became the laughing stocks of all because of their lack of wisdom.

Jesus tells us clearly what their mistake was: they both did not sit down, calculate and consider what their decisions really entailed.

To sit down, calculate and consider. Here we are at the heart of what wisdom is about: to pause and ponder in order to discern. We live in an increasingly fast-paced world where decisions must be made quickly and results must be delivered without delay. In this context the wisdom promoted by Jesus seems to be very challenging and yet it is still particularly relevant.

It is important to say that Jesus is not advocating procrastination which only allows wounds to fester and problems to increase. While procrastination betrays a refusal to act, the process of pondering reveals the desire to act responsibly and in accord with God's will.

To take the time to discern should prevent us from being conformed to the world (cf. Rom 12:2), from being guided by greed, pride and self-centredness. To take the time to discern bears witness to our desire to be faithful to the ways and values of the Gospel.

This morning our Gospel reading begins and ends with challenging words on the theme of discipleship. Two Sundays ago, St Luke reminded us that in order to be a disciple of Christ we need to enter by the narrow door (cf. Lk 13:22-30) and last Sunday he warned us that we need to humble ourselves (cf. Lk 14:1-14).

Today Jesus is quite clear about what is required of us: he wants us to check whether or not our commitment is real, whether or not our behaviour and our way of life match up the message we are called to proclaim.

In order to be consistent with our claim to be Christians, it is absolutely necessary for us to sit down and consider, not only once but regularly, whether or not our decisions, our political opinions, and the way we spend our money really bear witness to Christ.

Come to our minds the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer about "cheap grace" which is, according to him, "grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ." The acceptance of the gift of grace makes demands upon us. Discipleship implies renunciations which aim at freeing us so that we may follow the Lord in truth. Pope Francis reminded us that "discernment can only advance if we empty ourselves in order to be filled with the Spirit. Only if our freedom is set free from material, ideological, emotional attachments will we let the Spirit lead us more effectively." (Prologue, *Conversation in the Spirit*, 21.07.2023)

Once we have put our hands on the plough, we cannot look back (cf. Lk 9:62) to patterns of life which are modelled on the world. The call to follow Christ is costly because it challenges us and society when we make fear-driven and self-reliant decisions, when we promote a violently competitive and heartless world.

As Christians we have to pause and ponder so that we may be able to listen to God's words, to the promptings of the Spirit in our hearts, in the fellowship of the Church or in the world in order to ensure that we remain faithful to the Gospel.

There is nothing automatic about discipleship, it is a long process of ongoing discernment and perseverance in keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord. If we answer Jesus' call to discipleship then we cannot but let go of all that distracts us from what is really essential, genuinely good and life-giving.

What is particularly difficult in Jesus' words heard today is that he does not ask us to let go of bad things. Father, mother, wife, husband, children, brothers, sisters, possessions and life are very good things indeed. However we can sometimes have our priorities all wrong and make idols of good things.

So there is need for us to let go of all the things that prevent us from sitting down and listening freely to the Lord who "in the past spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Heb 1:1) and who today, in the Spirit, teaches us all things (cf. Jn 14:26).

Last June, Pope Leo invited us to "learn the art of discernment" in order to "avoid superficiality." (*Meditation*, 24.06.2025)

Discernment is necessary as we reflect seriously on the real and difficult questions that come our way in our families and in the world: the war in Ukraine, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the men and women still held hostage by the Hamas, the global gender issues, the migration crisis in Europe and in North America. That being said, the fact is that we have to begin within ourselves, to look at our lives, here and now, and ask ourselves: when is the last time we took the time to ponder and reflect on our discipleship, on our commitment to live Christian lives? When do we give an attentive ear to the Lord and so avoid superficiality in our relationship with him and our relationships with one another?

Like Mary, understanding, wisdom and discipleship come from pondering all things in our hearts (cf. Lk 2:19). May we not allow the pressure of life, the fears to make a mistake or to appear inadequate, the desire to keep up appearances, laziness and complacency which make us live superficial lives, leading us to skim the reality of life. As we take the time to sit down, consider and ponder, may we remember that we are not alone, Christ is faithful to his promise: "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20)