

**Homily for September 5, 2004
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Wisdom 9:13-18b
Psalm 90:3-6, 12-17
Philemon 9-10, 12-17
Luke 14:24-33**

We, too make choices – tough choices.

When I was much younger, I used to think that obedience was hard. Now I realize that it may be unpleasant, but I don't think it is really hard.

At least I knew then what was expected of me. Knowing which decisions to make...that is hard! This is particularly true when there are so many options from which to choose. Ours is a world characterized by multiple choices. Many young people enter the work force or enroll in college without having decided what to do for a living. Many brands of most products are on the market, all of which claim to be the best. And who can cope with more than 130 cable stations, available at the flick of the remote? Decisions, decisions, decisions! Someone, please just tell me which to choose!

Thus far, in Jesus' traveling with the crowds, he has not been too challenging of them. He has reserved most of his challenges for his own disciples – about attachment to possessions and greed. But now, in Luke chapter 14, Jesus forces the members of the crowd to make a decision, to “calculate the cost” of being one of his disciples. Jesus gives them three conditions for following him. First, one must “hate” his own family,

even his own life. (Most biblical scholars agree that the Greek term for “hate” is more accurately translated as “love less” in Jesus' Jewish cultural context.) Second, one must “bear his own cross.” And third, one must “renounce” all “possessions.” Jesus sends a very clear signal now to the crowds about the difference between simply being a spectator who is following Jesus and a disciple. The cost of discipleship is a very high calculation!

Jesus calls for the most radical decision making. We are to take time to calculate the cost. He offers his followers options: membership in society based on family ties, or membership in a community of faith based on commitment to Jesus. In both instances, believers are challenged to step beyond the confines of human custom and embrace a way of life that certainly transcends human limitations.

The way of life to which believers are called may appear to be foolishness (if judged by the values of the world), but it really embodies wisdom and insight. Jesus directs us to think things through before we make our decisions. But these decisions are to flow from our religious values, what the author of Wisdom calls “things [that] are in heaven.” We are called to make decisions as disciples of Jesus, not as merely foolish

people caught up in the cultural values of our time.

A young man named Duane was surprised when his girlfriend, Sue, announced that he would never be first in her life. "I love you," she said, "but you will never be first. God will always have first place." Duane was hurt at first, but came to see that Sue meant what she said. Duane and Sue will be married 12 years next Sunday. Duane has learned that, with God first, everybody wins.

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