23 OT-C **“A Disciple Loves”**

Our baptisms opened us to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, but it doesn’t just happen when the water hits our head. We have to intentionally choose to be a disciple, and this is tough to do in our American society.

We are groomed almost from our first breath to become consumers. Modern society from the time of the Industrial Revolution has been striving to produce the “*perfect consumer*” because this is the engine that drives our modern economies. Inevitably, therefore, this all-pervasive consumerism mindset influences how we hear and understand anything Jesus would teach us, especially his taught path to happiness and fulfillment.

To our society we are consumers; we are each “*economic units of consumption*” around which our economy spins. Not so with God. Our reality before God is that we are beloved children sustained by God and utterly dependent on God.

This is what Saint Paul reminds his friend Philemon today. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon’s who had escaped to join up with Paul. Paul in compliance with the law and custom of the time sends Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter. It reminds Philemon that he is indebted to Paul for preaching the Gospel for which Paul is now imprisoned.

Philemon is challenged to look beyond the world's perspective at the time to God's perspective where there is no slave or free, Jew or Greek. Philemon is challenged to recognize his indebtedness. A first step to becoming a disciple of Jesus.

Our reality before God is that like Philemon, we are debtors. Even that which we think we own is really on loan from God.

One would think gratitude would then be the order of the day for us, but gratitude in a consumer mindset can all too readily be replaced with an “it's their job” attitude. “*Sure, God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to suffer and die for me, but how could an all-loving God do otherwise? I mean God is love, right? It's God's job to save me*.” Thus, the consumer mindset makes God's extraordinary sacrifice routine, God's miraculous intervention mundane and inevitable.

Yet, the truth that Saint Thomas Aquinas noted is God has no need of us. God is complete without us. The only reason we are offered salvation at all is because of God's generosity, not because we deserve it, not because God has to do it, just because God wants to.

Only God knows why he loves us, a ragtag collection of imperfect people, but he does, and we are in his debt. God owns the lean on our lives, in fact he's got the title.

A disciple of Jesus is keenly aware of this debt and in gratitude wants to respond. Not in a calculating “tit for tat” mentality but as one lover to another. Only a lover can understand the total giving Jesus preaches in today's Gospel. A story:

**There was once a man who got lost in a desert. He wandered around aimlessly for days slowly dying of thirst having emptied all his canteens. Then by chance he stumbled across a lone palm tree under which stood an old water well. There was a hand pump over the well and next to it under the bucket used to collect the water was a tall glass of water and a note. Note read as follows,**

**“If you have stumbled across this well then, I know you are thirsty. I know you will be tempted to drink this glass of water in your thirst but don't. You need to travel due West from here for two more days to find the village and you cannot make it without filling your travel canteens. Take this glass of water and pour all of it into the pump to prime. You must pour all of it into the pump if the pump is going to work. Once the water is flowing and you have drunken your fill and filled your canteens, fill the glass of water for the next traveler. God be with you. PS trust me on this!”**

What do you do? You are dying of thirst, and you have a glass of water in your hand.

Do you cling to it or trust the promise of another who came before you and pour all of it into the pump risking even the little water you have?

God gives us this glass of water we call our life with a promise. If we pour all of it into our discipleship, we will have more than enough to sustain us through this valley of tears. But it takes the whole glass. Not just what is left over after we have drunk our fill. Not just what we feel in our hearts ought to be enough. All of it, the whole thing. Anything less will leave us dead in the desert. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a lover of Jesus. And when someone loves another, they hold nothing of themselves back.

A consumer will always see Jesus, and anything associated with Jesus including Church, as a commodity whose worth is found in what I can get out of it. A disciple, as is the case with all lovers, can't give enough of themselves to their beloved and finds happiness in living for the one they love. This is where stewardship comes into the picture.

Stewardship is not about what we need to do “to keep the goods flowing.” Stewardship is not just about what we “owe” God for services rendered or favors bestowed. Stewardship is the means through which our discipleship, flowing from our love of Jesus Christ, finds concrete expression. Stewardship is what the love of a follower of Jesus does for Jesus.

Personally welcome Jesus into our lives and journey toward him, then as disciples, through this stewardship, real happiness will be ours.