

23rd Sunday (C)

- I came upon a story about a tribe in Africa that has an ingenious way of trapping wild monkeys.
- They hollow out a pumpkin and then cut a little slit in it just big enough for a monkey to slip his hand through.
- Then they fill the pumpkin with peanuts and tie it to a tree and leave.
- When all is quiet, curious monkeys come to investigate.
- They smell the peanuts and sure enough one of them squeezes his hand through the slit to grab the nuts.
- But the opening is not big enough for the monkey to pull out his clenched fist.
- The monkey will refuse to open his clenched fist and lose his peanuts - he's stuck.
- When the hunters return, they easily pick up the monkey and sell him to animal merchants - the monkey will end up in a zoo forever because he didn't know enough to let go. We can behave similarly.
- We don't let go of the things that can make our lives so much less than we would want them to be.
- The so called treasures that we can cling to demand much of us and can rob us of more genuine treasures of life that can bring a deeper fulfillment.
- Perhaps from the story of the monkey we can learn that the gifts of God can only be grasped with open hands.
- The closed and grasping hands of materialism and self-centeredness condemn us to a life of emptiness and it takes wisdom to know what is truly life-giving for us and for those we love.
- Today's first reading is about wisdom.
- It speaks about the limits of our knowledge, "It is hard for us to work out what is on earth, laborious to know that which lies within our reach."
- Then it notes that the Way of God is revealed to us through his Holy Spirit.
- God has offered us the wisdom to live meaningful lives now and forever.
- Then the Gospel makes the wisdom of God concrete.
- Do you ever have your children asking you to give them permission to do something and if you hesitate or say "no" they will reply that "everyone is doing it", so why can't I?
- But this isn't just restricted to children – there is a notion that if everyone is doing something, then it must be right.
- But really "everyone" isn't really *every person*; it's often a convenient way to get out of thinking things through for ourselves by informing ourselves properly OR it's simply that a popular opinion suits my own attitudes which I don't want to change.

- The ways, mind-sets, expectations & demands of the many can be taken on by individuals who then become slaves to fashion, competitiveness, approval, by behaving and thinking in a way that enables me to fit in.
- In today's Gospel Jesus offers everyone the chance to be deeply free - as his disciples.
- He invites us to resist the pull of other persons and things.
- That's what Jesus means when he says, if people come to him without hating their father & mother & brothers & sisters etc and even their own lives, they cannot be his disciples"
- In the Hebrew there is no comparative degree, like "more" or "less".
- In Hebrew you cannot say "love less", so you have to say "hate" or "despise".
- Hating in this context means being detached enough from outside influences so as to avoid being controlled by them.
- Christ sets us free to think for ourselves in the right way.
- In wanting our "yes" to discipleship, Jesus through the 2 parables of building a tower or going to war, indicates the necessary caution of thoughtful consideration and preparation before embarking on the discipleship road.
- The strength of Jesus' words, his challenging radical assertions, is to make us think seriously about our "yes" to the demands of being a follower, because an unconsidered "yes" is pointless.
- The tower builder and king going into battle are given to us as models of preparation for a serious commitment, of a sober calculating the cost involved.
- The commitment made at baptism requires constant ratification.
- From a human standpoint we need to grow in our "yes" and own it as our free response to Christ's call of us, realising that there are ever deepening levels of commitment to Christ.
- No matter how heavy our crosses become, Christ cares for us, helps us carry the cross, and loves us for uniting our burdens to his.
- We can free ourselves from those things which would diminish his presence and activity in our lives.
- We can let go of the peanuts of this life and open our hands to Christ who enriches us more than we could ever dream of.
- What do you need to let go of – from what do you need to be set free – to make your life more meaningful?