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Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Our Lady Queen of Peace

It's official: Summer is over, and the last students went back to school. I even got a distress call from one of my friends with four school-age kids: "I know the kids had a good summer, but **I** didn't. When is **my** break?" With the return of school we hear a good amount of complaints and grief.

I am wondering in light of today's gospel, if the hearers of Jesus' words were on the verge of complaining and murmuring with grief. After all, he was teaching them about what is involved in being one of his disciples. I would like to reflect on the Liturgy of the Word in somewhat of a familiar way during this back to school time: The three "R's" of discipleship: Relationships, Routine, Remembering

First, **Relationships**. What Jesus had to say was not easy. We heard the same words:

"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother,? wife and children, brothers and sisters,? and even his own life,? he cannot be my disciple.

Not easy for us to hear. We can't imagine what those first disciples, first students of the Lord heard. What they were feeling and thinking.

A few points to help us along. The Hebrew word "hate" does not mean detest. Rather, it means to put behind all else. To make our last priority. I realize that this hardly makes it better, but for the audience of St. Luke, it does make sense. He was writing to the outcasts, to people who were probably without family, without the status and power that came with the Jewish elites. They were shunned women, widows, poor and sick people, pushed to the outskirts of society. And, Jesus was assuring them that they could have a place in his community of disciples where his blood made them family. Jesus was redefining relationships and relieving those who had none or any to bring them identity.

We see this same reordering of relationship in Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul calls Onesimus "brother," a family member, setting him free of the slavery that bound him up and kept him down in society.

Jesus is powerfully teaching us that Christian discipleship is a clear call to reorder and redefine our relationships. To be related to Jesus is to be related to all and to claim some responsibility to care for them, even those who society would say are beneath us, as Onesimus was once beneath Philemon. Here, Jesus shatters social hierarchy and status and power in relating. Yet, we still hold onto it. When will it end?

Routine. The great writer, Annie Dillard said: "How we spend our days is how we spend our lives" (*The Writing Life*, p. 32). She is right. We hear Jesus talk about great

planning in two parables today, constructing a tower and building an army. I think we spend a lot of time thinking about our lives, but little time thinking about how we spend each day. The great automaticity of our days sometimes is more powerful than we are. We work, we eat, we exercise, we take care of those we are responsible for, commute, and sleep and then start over again. Do our days and weeks give the necessary time for personal prayer and social service and communal fellowship and fun? Does the time of our day reflect the discipleship we strive for? Or, do our routines simply control our lives...

St. Francis de Sales advises us that each day, each moment is a new opportunity to love God, letting go of yesterday and not worrying about tomorrow. If we are not pleased with the way our lives are going, perhaps we are being called to change something about the way we spend our days. Today, is a great place to start, at least in the resetting of our daily routines.

Remembering. Yesterday, about 100 people gathered in Childs, MD, to celebrate a 100th anniversary of our Oblate community living and working and praying there. Perhaps you have seen it. Going north on I-95 just before you get to DE, there is a statue of Mary, Our Lady of the Highways. That is the place where my brothers first learned how to be Oblates. Now, it is our retirement center, our assisted care facility, and our cemetery. We gathered yesterday to remember, to tell and listen to stories, to laugh and cry, to remember. Not just what we had done, but what God had done for us. Through the kindness of Visitation Sisters, who gave us the money to buy the land more than 100 years ago and through benefactors who still support us. And through the grace of God that allowed us to flourish, we go on.

How well do we remember the good deeds that God has done for us? After all, isn't that the purpose of Sabbath: To remember and rejoice in the good things of our lives. Cardinal Godfreid Danneels recently wrote about the liturgy and some of the important debates we are having about it. He said that sometimes we forget that the liturgy is first about what God has done for us. Do we remember that this is what we are gathering to celebrate? Yes, what God has done for us—and continues to do for us, most especially feed us on his undying love.

The week that lies ahead of us shall be a tough one. We will hear a report on the war that may anger or depress us. We will remember an anniversary of September 11 that may do the same. Two big events, and God only knows what our personal lives will bring. Yet, we enter this week renewed as disciples. As people who can reorder our relationships, we can take a look at our daily routines so that we remember just who we are: We are loved by God.

May God be praised!