

WORD FOR SUNDAY

Father Albert Stanton

Sunday's Readings: (R1) Wis. 9:13-18. (R2) Phlm. 1:9-10. (R3) Lk. 14:25-33.

Again in our first reading for Sunday, we have a piece from Wisdom literature. Like so many modern songs, it is a series of questions: "What man can know the mind of God?" the wise man asks. He answers, "Nobody. Why we don't even know the things of earth, how can we presume to know the things of heaven? Furthermore, human timidity distorts deliberations and human weaknesses make plans unsure." There is a way, however, the wise man tells us — it must be given from above. When God gives Wisdom and His holy Spirit from on high, man can learn His pleasure. Prayer for Wisdom and God's Spirit, therefore, is imperative. Such is the wise man's conclusion.

The culmination of Israel's desire and prayer was Wisdom, Jesus Christ, who sent His Spirit to save man from human folly. Again Jesus qualifies as a wise man by speaking like one. His parables about building a tower and about a king going out to battle another king are worthy of a wise man.

The tower Jesus spoke of was familiar to his audience. Towers could be found in almost every vineyard of any size. They were used to store equipment and as a lookout against thieves. His hearers, too, could easily imagine the strategy of kings when at war.

Jesus used both parables to illustrate the need for weighing one's capacities before doing anything. Nothing can be more discouraging than to begin something and then not be able to finish it, because the task was really beyond one's ability. To dream of doing great things beyond one's capacity can be a subtle temptation to avoid the little things that can and should be done.

But Jesus is more than a wise man. Again, as prophet, He adds a Christian dimension to Wisdom literature. It is this: if we think about it, we shall see that it is folly to let anything (even loved ones) separate us from Him. The stark honesty of Jesus shocks us. But He demands all or nothing. To follow Him, we must be ready to give up everything else.

The second reading illustrates how much sacrifice one must be ready to make. In a day when a slave was as valuable as a car, St. Paul had no hesitation in asking his friend Philemon to give up a slave, Onesimus.

Onesimus was a runaway slave. The only safe place for a slave to go was to get lost in the anonymity of a big city. Hence Onesimus fled to Rome. No doubt he had helped himself to some of his master's money, his master being Philemon. In Rome Onesimus met Paul, now about fifty years old ("an old man") and still under home arrest in his first Roman Captivity (61-63 B.C.).

Onesimus was converted and agreed to return home to his master at Colossae. Paul and Philemon were such good friends that Paul felt free to ask Philemon to return Onesimus to himself so that Onesimus could be Paul's helper.

It seems strange that Paul's letter to Philemon should find a place in the New Testament. Perhaps it was felt to be important because it set down Paul's approach to the question of slavery. Paul did not condemn a social structure he could not change — neither did Jesus for that matter. Rather Paul sought to nullify slavery by changing men's hearts. By insisting that slaves be treated as brothers, it soon became apparent that there was little advantage in having slaves. In today's liturgy, the passage simply underlines the theme that to follow Christ, no sacrifice is too great to ask. The disciple of Christ must give and not count the cost.

Whalens Seek Funds For Mexico Mission

Avon — Daniel and Margaret Whalen, diocesan lay missionaries who support a dispensary and food program in Santa Ana Tepetitlan, Mexico, will hold a fund-raising gathering at their home Sunday, Sept. 8, here at 1549 Rochester Rd. (Route 15), to continue their work in the remote hills outside Guadalajara.

According to a friend, who this year spent several months in the mission, Mrs. Byrne:

"There is no telephone at Santa Ana, and no doctor except the one paid by Dan and Margaret, who comes five days a week. Financing the dispensary is very costly. Patients are asked to give a small cooperation fee. Those who can, pay a token amount toward cost of medicine; but the very poor cannot pay anything.

"Plus their own earnings, Dan and Margaret depend upon the

charity of friends to meet the expenses of their mission. Inflation spirals acutely in Mexico, with tragic consequences for the poor. There is no welfare in Mexico as we know it. Cost of medicine rises alarmingly.

"In Santa Ana the Indian people lack education and skills so their earnings are very meager, and soaring food prices have increased malnutrition with all its evils.

"Dan and Margaret want to continue their weekly allotment of food for elderly women, some of whom are blind. The food packages have been a great help to these poorest of the poor.

"It is not easy to picture the degree of poverty and the primitive living conditions of the Indian people Dan and Margaret serve so unselfishly.

"They also furnish fabrics, and Margaret teaches sewing to the Indian women who make maternity dresses, layettes, etc. We had three lively fiestas which were joyous occasions; raffles, music, food and soft drinks; plus prizes for best sewing. A fiesta is eagerly welcomed since there is little recreation at Santa Ana.

"Dan and Margaret urgently need financial help to continue their mission."

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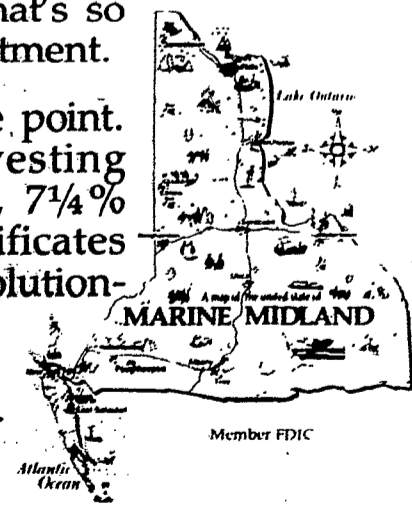
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