

Father O'Connor's Homily for 7 September 2025
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Wisdom 9: 13-18b
Philemon 9-10, 12-17
Luke 14: 25-33

All of us have heard the Christmas carol, “Good King Wenceslaus looked out, on the feast of Saint Stephen.” It is about Saint Wenceslaus, the patron saint of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, who died in 929. His feast day is in on 28 September.

His father, the Duke of Bohemia, was a devout Christian and was killed in a battle when Wenceslaus was still young. His mother was a Christian in name only. His maternal grandmother, Saint Ludmilla, taught the young prince to be a true follower of Christ. Her influence on him was the object of envy on the part of Wenceslaus' mother, who later brought about Ludmilla's death – the murder of her own mother.

His younger brother, Boleslaus, schemed to take over the throne. One day, Wenceslaus went to church to pray, and right before the altar, his own brother and his cohorts stabbed him to death at the age of 22.

There was a lot of hate and there was a lot of virtue in that family.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that unless we “hate” our father and mother and brothers and sisters we cannot be His disciples. What kind of talk is this? Is a loving Jesus preaching hate to the crowd?

In the language that Jesus spoke, Aramaic, if you wanted to say, “I prefer this to that,” you would actually say, “I like this and I hate that.” Hate meant to like something less than something else. Saint Matthew records the meaning of Jesus in this way: “Anyone who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me” [Matthew 10: 37].

In other words, Jesus declares that everyone who wants to follow Him must love Him more than anybody or anything else – even more than our parents and family. Thank God, most of our family members – unlike the mother and brother of Saint Wenceslaus – are the very ones who inspire us to love Our Lord above all else.

Are we followers of Jesus in that sense? The answer lies in whom or in what we hold as our number-one loyalty. Is it Jesus? For some, it is money or power. For others it is alcohol or drugs or sexuality. For others it is pride or greed or even violence. Look at the state of our world today as

we remember this week the tragic events of 11 September 2001, and as we view with anxiety the ongoing violence in Ukraine and the Middle East and in other areas of our world, and even in our own communities.

Today's Gospel, underneath its exaggerated talk of hating one's family, is about our loyalties. Following Jesus does indeed come with the cost of self-surrender.

It is possible to be a "fan" of Jesus without being a real "follower."

Someone was talking to a great scholar about a young man who had attended his class. He said, "My friend told me that he was one of your students." The scholar answered devastatingly, "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students."

Perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of the Church today is that within it are so many distant admirers of Jesus, and not enough real disciples.

Saint Wenceslaus had a personal love for Jesus. He built churches and repaired them. He visited Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament each day. He even planted with his own hands the wheat and grapes for the bread and wine at Mass – that would become the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Good King Wenceslaus not only reached up to Christ in prayer, but he also reached out to the needy with his help – all for the love of Christ.

This is what Jesus is asking of us in today's Gospel. Prefer Christ. Choose Christ. Follow Christ – before everyone and everything else.

But when we are fearful of what it takes to follow Jesus, let us remember that the One who called us to walk the narrow path is with us every step of the way. And He promises to be there until our journey's end when He welcomes His faithful ones to heaven.

We sang of Our Lord's faithfulness to us in today's Responsorial Psalm: "In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge" [Psalm 90].

Lord, help us to be faithful to you, no matter the cost of self-surrender. For you are our refuge and our strength, now and forever. Amen.