

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 12, 2021

Reflect with me, to see if this is not true for yourselves. It has been through the most difficult times in life that I have learned that faith will carry me through. It has been in the most vulnerable times in life that I identified with Jesus the most. It has been through my weakest moment in life I learned that God is my strength. It has been through my greatest suffering that I learned that there is power in the cross. Our readings today are teaching us this great truth and yet I, and we, know we still have a hard time understanding the benefits, meaning and beauty of the crosses in our life.

Today's reading is the turning point in Mark's Gospel. It has become clear to those around Jesus as they witnessing his preaching and teaching, his miracles and deeds that He is something greater than an ordinary prophet. Mark is making it clear to all that Jesus is the Son of God, yet there are still many who after witnessing such miracles and deeds still do not believe. So Jesus stops his disciples to ask what others are saying about him. And we get the answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. That is what others have been saying about Jesus. Then He asks them personally, "Who do you say that I am? What do you believe?" Peter speaks for all of them when he announces that they believe Jesus to be the Christ, "You are the Christ."

Peter's choice of words was one of great anticipation for the Jewish people. The word Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, which means "the anointed one." At the time of Jesus, many believed the Messiah would return with these popular expectations of a political leader who would free the Jewish people from Roman occupation. But Jesus doesn't use this title, he uses the title Son of Man as he explains to Peter and the others. As derived from the Jewish Scriptures found in the Book of Daniel and in other apocryphal writings, the title Son of Man is best understood to mean "human being." Jesus is making it clear that the Christ and the Son of Man is going to be totally different than what Peter and the others were expecting.

Jesus goes on to explain what Christ the Son of Man means. He will be rejected, must suffer and die, and will rise after three days. Peter's notion of Christ is what most Jews thought of the Messiah, and he could not accept this from Jesus. Where is our new King David that would free them from the Roman Authority, and establish them as a national power once again?

What Peter hears from Jesus was hard to accept. So much so that Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. "*Jesus, this is what I mean by Messiah*". Jesus in turn rebukes Peter and goes as far as to say, "*Get behind me Satan*". The image of the Christ that Jesus is giving is not the image of the Messiah that Peter was expecting, nor anyone else at that time. Jesus then teaches the crowd and the disciples about the path of discipleship. To be Christ's disciple is to follow in the way of the cross.

The Way of the Cross. Death by crucifixion was all too familiar as a method of execution in Roman-occupied territories. The path that Jesus was inviting his disciples to

share meant tremendous suffering and death. This is the kind of radical commitment and sacrifice that Jesus calls us to adopt for the sake of the Gospel.

Again, Jesus asks his disciples: “*Who do people say that I am?*” We know the answers the people gave. Now we must answer that question for ourselves: “*But who do you say that I am?*” Can we say you are the Christ? You are my God? My Lord of Lords?

Remember many of us don’t like pain and suffering. Most of us will avoid pain and suffering at all costs. So knowing that in saying Jesus is the Christ, there will be a cross. How do we respond? Do we pick up our cross, deny ourselves and follow him? We will lose our life for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. Or do we run away, deny Him, and continue searching for an easier religion; one without the cross which we know does not exist. If there is no cross, then there is no Jesus.

We understand Peter, and yet ultimately in the end of Peter’s life he did accept the cross and die for Jesus. What is the difference between the Peter that rebukes Jesus and the Peter that accepts the cross at the end of his life? Which Peter do you most relate to?

Following Jesus today is not always easy. It was difficult for Jesus’ disciples and the crowds to follow him knowing they would have to suffer. It is just as difficult today, to pick up our cross and follow him – especially in the midst of uncertainty and doubt.

Jesus asked, “*Who do people say that I am?*” He is asking each one of us today, “*Who do you say that I am?*” I hope and pray our answer will be: You are the Christ, the one who suffered, died upon the cross. Your love is saving and redeeming at this moment, there is no other. Even though I don’t understand at times, I will accept and pick up my cross to follow you.

We have to ask God to give us the grace to follow him. St. Thomas Aquinas understood the meaning of the cross. He states this about the cross: “*On The Cross exemplifies every virtue; It is a remedy, for, in the face of all the evils.*”

If you seek the example of love: “Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends.”

If you seek patience, you will find no better example than the cross.

If you seek an example of humility, look upon the crucified one.

If you seek an example of obedience, follow him who became obedient to the Father even unto death.

If you seek an example of despising earthly things, follow him who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

If you seek an example of detachment, do not be attached, therefore, to clothing and riches, because “*they divided my garments among themselves.*”