

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

Sharing the Cross of Jesus

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Is 50:5-9, Jas 2:14-18, Mk 8:27-35

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In response to the direct question of Jesus, “**who do you say I am,**” Peter answers, “the Christ, the Messiah, the promised one of Israel.”

At the time of Jesus there existed a variety of ideas about the Messiah and his role. Some of these had political and military overtones. It was widely thought that the Messiah would overthrow the powers of darkness and sin and bring about the victory of God’s people. As significant as Peter’s recognition of Jesus as the Christ was, it was only a beginning. The disciples had not yet understood the distinctive way in which Jesus was to fulfill Israel’s hopes. We were told that he began to teach them that he would have to suffer.

Who is Jesus for you? Peter’s quick response to that question, professes that Jesus is truly the Christ. No mortal being could have revealed that to Peter; but only God. Through faith Peter grasped who Jesus truly was. He was the first apostle to recognize Jesus as the *Anointed One* (Messiah and Christ). Peter's faith, however was truly tested when Jesus explained that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die in order that God's work of redemption may be accomplished. How startled the disciples were when they heard these words! Peter argues that this should not happen to the Messiah. Jesus’ response could hardly be more severe. He calls Peter ‘Satan,’ the tempter, and says that he is thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow after him, to listen to him, to learn from him, to share his life and destiny. The cross most obviously becomes a part of our discipleship when we, too, have to face suffering and death. Here Jesus’ cross can be an enormous consolation. The cross for us, as for him, leads to the resurrection. True disciple is about self-denial and if we want to be his followers, we must renounce ourselves and take up the cross and follow him. Today’s second reading puts it eloquently. If someone is naked or hungry and we do nothing, then what good is our faith? If we say we believe, then we must put those words to action. I believe that was what St. James was trying to tell us in our second reading, when he says that Faith without works is dead. Faith requires taking a risk – getting into the wheelbarrow.

To illustrate this I'd like to share a story about the great tightrope walker, Charles Blondin. Once Blondin gathered a crowd at Niagara Falls. He asks them if they believe he can walk a tightrope stretched across the Falls. The crowd cheers their

approval. Then he asks if they believe he can do it blindfolded. Once again a booming cheer. Finally he asks if they believe he can do it pushing a wheelbarrow while blindfolded. They crowd goes wild. Blondin then approaches a man who seems to be cheering the loudest. "Do you really believe I can do it?" "Of course," the man says. "Then," says Blondin, "Will you get in the wheelbarrow?"

That man is like you or at least like me for sure. I do believe Jesus is God. I believe that He can do all. Still, I'm a little reluctant to get in the wheelbarrow. It's one thing to believe; it's something else to put your body and your life on line.

The wheelbarrow represents the Church. I admit it looks rickety, especially after our summer of shame. However I am grateful for all who have stood the test of time, have held firm, persevered and stood fast in their faith.

To be a follower of Jesus means to love out neighbor, to forgive those who has hurt or wronged us, to reach out to those in need. It means to do the work of peace and not of violence, to put something into life and not just to take from it. To do such things, one must learn self-discipline and self-denial. This, too, is part of taking up our cross.

In a few moments, as we approach this table to receive and be one with the Lord, let us ask our Heavenly Father to give us the courage, the strength and the wisdom to bear witness to our faith by taking up our cross as we continue to walk united as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. And as always, let us ask him to guide our thoughts, our feelings and our actions.

How different are God's thoughts and ways from our thoughts and ways! Through humiliation, suffering, and death on the cross Jesus broke the powers of sin and death and won for us our salvation. Faith requires taking a risk - getting into the wheelbarrow, or to put it more directly, taking up our cross, that backpack or whatever it is.

The Lord Jesus tests each of us personally with the same question that he asked his disciples: ***Who do you say that I am? What will you answer be?***

***The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my Shepherd. I walk with no fear.
May God Bless each and every one of you.***

