

GOSPEL
Matthew 16:21-27

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said. 'This must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life?

'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.'

A HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II
2 September 1984, Excerpt

The readings for this Sunday's Mass give us a powerful lesson on the totality of love that God demands of us. The prophet Jeremiah, in the passage we read that has been called his "Confessions," dramatically recognizes the power of God's love, which called him to prophesy for the conversion of his people: "You seduced me, O Lord, and I let myself be seduced... In my heart there was something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I tried to contain it, but I could not" (Jer 20:7, 9). The prophet responded fully to God's call, even though it made him a sign of contradiction; he allowed himself to be "seized" by God, to whom he adhered with all his strength.

Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, asks the same of us: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will find it... What can a man give in exchange for his life?" (Mt 16:24ff.).

We must follow Christ with the strength of love. We must give love for love. Because he loved us first: he set out on the way of the cross out of love for us, foreseeing all its painful details and resolutely opposing the reductive interpretations and counsels of human prudence that even Peter had tried to offer. Who more than Peter has been privileged by Christ? Yet he even calls him "Satan" when he tries to divert the Master from the royal path of the cross. This is how much Jesus Christ loved us: at the cost of his own blood, in obedience offered to the Father without asking anything for himself.

Jesus also asks each of us to give ourselves completely: he asks us to follow him on our daily "via crucis", not to refuse him those conquests, sometimes achieved even at the cost of hidden heroism, that he demands from those who want to remain faithful to him, always and at all costs; he asks us to carry the cross of our daily life, without retreating, clinging to him so as not to fall through distrust or weariness, much less without ever betraying, in the perspective of the final judgment: "Because he is the Son of man," today's Gospel concludes, "he will come in the glory of his Father... and will reward each person according to their deeds (Mt 16:27). And, as has been said, we will be judged on love.

Love for God "with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind"; love for our brother as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-39). "For this reason, love of God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment," Vatican II reiterated. "Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when he prays to the Father that 'they may all be one, as you and I are one' (Jn 17:21-22)... suggested to us a certain similarity between the union of the divine persons and the union of the children of God in truth and charity. This similarity shows that man, who is the only creature on earth that God has willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self" (Gaudium et Spes , 24).

"O God, our Father, stir up love in us and revive our faith."

I raise this prayer to the Lord for you and with you, at this Mass.

Be faithful, dear brothers and sisters!

Always faithful, without conforming to the mentality of this century.

continued over page ►

Always faithful, in transforming your mind , and
being a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

Faithful in following the cross of Christ.

In putting God first. "O God, you are my God, I seek
you, / my soul thirsts for you, / my flesh longs for
you... / For your steadfast love is better than life, / my
lips will praise you. / So will I bless you as long as I
live (Responsorial Psalm).

Yes, brothers and sisters; so be it with you, every day
of your life.

With the protection of Saint Sixtus, pope and martyr.

With the constant intercession of the Mother of God,
whom you love so much, and who loves you so much.

So that you may be a community of faith and love.

Amen, amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/
Homily?



Head: Jesus says that whoever loses their
life for his sake will find it. What does this
Gospel suggest about the difference between
self-preservation and self-giving?



Heart: St John Paul II says that we only truly
find ourselves through a sincere gift of self.
Where is Jesus inviting you to trust him more
deeply by letting go, surrendering, or giving of
yourself?



Hands: What is one cross, responsibility,
or act of love that you are being called to
embrace faithfully rather than avoid this
week?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members
briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g.
"Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where
appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to
place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that
you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of
praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.