

## 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 REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

*30 August 2020*

Today’s Gospel passage (cf. Mt 16:21-27) is linked to that of last Sunday (cf. Mt 16:13-20). After Peter, on behalf of the other disciples as well, has professed his faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, Jesus himself begins to speak to them about his Passion. Along the path to Jerusalem, he openly explains to his friends what awaits him at the end in the Holy City: he foretells the mystery of his death and Resurrection, of his humiliation and glory. He says that he will have to “suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16:21). But his words are not understood, because the disciples have a faith that is still immature and too closely tied to the mentality of this world (cf. Rom 12:2). They think of too earthly a victory, and therefore they do not understand the language of the cross.

At the prospect that Jesus may fail and die on the cross, Peter himself rebels and says to Him: “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (v. 22).

He believes in Jesus — Peter is like this — he has faith, he believes in Jesus; he believes; he wants to follow him, but does not accept that his glory will pass through the Passion. For Peter and the other disciples — but for us too! — the cross is an uncomfortable thing, the cross is a “hindrance”, whereas Jesus considers the “hindrance” escaping the cross, which would mean avoiding the Father’s will, the mission that the Father has entrusted to him for our salvation. For this reason Jesus responds to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men” (v. 23). Ten minutes earlier, Jesus had praised Peter. He had promised him he would be the base of his Church, its foundation; ten minutes later he says to him, “Satan”. How can this be understood? It happens to us all! In moments of devotion, of fervour, of good will, of closeness to our neighbour, we look to Jesus and we go forward; but in moments in which we approach the cross, we flee. The devil, Satan — as Jesus says to Peter — tempts us. It is typical of the evil spirit, it is typical of the devil to make us stray from the cross, from the cross of Jesus.

Addressing everyone then, Jesus adds: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (v. 24). In this way he indicates the way of the true disciple, showing two attitudes. The first is “to renounce oneself”, which does not mean a superficial change, but a conversion, a reversal of mentality and of values. The other attitude is that of taking up one’s own cross. It is not just a matter of patiently enduring daily tribulations, but of bearing with faith and responsibility that part of toil, and that part of suffering that the struggle against evil entails. The life of Christians is always a struggle. The Bible says that the life of Christians is a military undertaking: fighting against the evil spirit, fighting against Evil.

Thus the task of “taking up the cross” becomes participating with Christ in the salvation of the world. Considering this, let us make sure that the cross hanging on the wall at home, or that little one that we wear around our neck, is a sign of our

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wish to be united with Christ in lovingly serving our brothers and sisters, especially the littlest and most fragile. The cross is the holy sign of God's Love, it is a sign of Jesus' Sacrifice, and is not to be reduced to a superstitious object or an ornamental necklace. Each time we fix our gaze on the image of Christ crucified, let us contemplate that he, as the true Servant of the Lord, has accomplished his mission, giving life, spilling his blood for the pardoning of sins. And let us not allow ourselves to be drawn to the other side by the temptation of the Evil One. Therefore, if we want to be his disciples, we are called to imitate him, expending our life unreservedly out of love of God and neighbour.

May the Virgin Mary, united to her Son unto Calvary, help us not to retreat in the face of the trials and suffering that witnessing to the Gospel entails.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



**Head:** Where do you struggle with temptation and evil? What were some of the temptations Jesus faced?



**Heart:** How have you experienced Jesus' invitation that "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"? How does this make you feel?



**Hands:** In what ways can we imitate Jesus more fully in 'renouncing ourselves' and 'taking up our cross'?

## 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.'