

## 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

Today's Gospel passage is the continuation of last Sunday's, which highlighted the profession of faith of Peter, the "rock" upon which Jesus wishes to build his Church. Today, in stark contrast, Matthew shows us the reaction of the same Peter when Jesus reveals to his disciples that He will have to suffer, be killed, and rise again. Peter takes the Teacher aside and reproaches Him because this — he says — cannot happen to Him, to Christ. But Jesus, in turn, rebukes Peter with harsh words: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men". A moment before, the Apostle had been blessed by the Father, because he had received that revelation from Him; he was a solid "rock" so that Jesus could build His community upon him; and immediately afterwards he becomes an obstacle,

a rock but not for building, a stumbling block on the Messiah's path. Jesus knows well that Peter and the others still have a long way to go to become his Apostles!

At that point, the Teacher turns to all those who were following Him, clearly presenting them the path to follow: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". Always, today too, the temptation is that of wanting to follow a Christ without the cross, on the contrary, of teaching God which is the right path; like Peter: "No, no Lord! This shall never happen". But Jesus reminds us that his way is the way of love, and that there is no true love without self sacrifice. We are called to not let ourselves be absorbed by the vision of this world, but to be ever more aware of the need and of the effort for we Christians to walk against the current and uphill.

Jesus completes his proposal with words that express a great and ever valid wisdom, because they challenge the egocentric mentality and behaviour. He exhorts: "whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. This paradox contains the golden rule that God inscribed in the human nature created in Christ: the rule that only love gives meaning and happiness to life. To spend one's own talents, one's energy and one's time only to save, protect and fulfil oneself, in reality leads to losing oneself, i.e. to a sad and barren existence. Instead let us live for the Lord and base our life on love, as Jesus did: we will be able to savour authentic joy, and our life will not be barren; it will be fruitful.

In the Eucharistic celebration we relive the mystery of the Cross; we not only remember, but we commemorate the redeeming Sacrifice in which the Son of God completely loses Himself so as to be received anew by the Father and thus find us again, we who were lost, together with all creatures. Each time we take part in the Holy Mass, the love of the crucified and Risen Christ is conveyed to us as food and drink, so that we may follow Him on the daily path, in concrete service to our brothers and sisters.

May Mary Most Holy, who followed Jesus up to Calvary, accompany us too and help us not to be afraid of the cross, but with Jesus nailed [to it], not a cross without Jesus, the Cross with Jesus, which is the cross of suffering for love of God and of our brothers and sisters, because this suffering, by the grace of Christ, bears the fruit of resurrection.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to you to "take up your cross and follow Jesus"?
- Do you experience moments in your life where you are being asked to compromise your beliefs? How do you respond?
- Suffering is always difficult to endure. What are some ways that we can remain close to God in times of suffering? Do you have an experience to share?

## 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. Move to 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 reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.