

## HOMILY for 24<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's Gospel tells us to take up our Crosses and follow in Jesus' footsteps. Reflecting on it, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A Jewish couple have a son who is very smart, but a bit troublesome. At the age of five, they send him to a yeshiva and within a week they hear that things aren't going well. After a couple of months, they are asked to take him out of school, since he is not setting a good example for the other children.

Things go from bad to worse. They send him to the local public school & by then end of the first semester they are asked to remove him because he has a serious behavior problem. Then, they send him away to military school &, in their dismay, there too, he is considered incorrigible.

Finally in desperation, the parents take him to the only place left – the local parochial school. A week passes, & then another, & a month goes by & they don't hear anything from the school. There are no complaints about his performance, no reports of trouble. Their curiosity is really aroused when he comes home at the end of the semester with a report card showing three Bs & the rest As. And at the end of the second semester, he has straight As on his report card; & his performance has been so good that he is the top student in his class.

At last his mother can contain herself no longer & she says to him, "Son, what's going on? We send you to the yeshiva & they throw you out. The public school can't deal with you, & even at military school you were considered incorrigible. But now, with these Catholics, you're not only behaving yourself, you're getting wonderful grades."

"Well, Mama," says the boy, "the truth is that I wasn't impressed by those other places, but the first thing I see when I go into this school is a Jewish guy nailed to a cross; & I know it's time for me to get my act together!"

Anyhow, like that Jewish boy in the cute story above, Jesus was dead serious about the way of the Cross. In this Sunday's Gospel, we were told that He summoned the crowd with His disciples & said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he/she must deny his/her very self, take up his/her cross, & follow in my steps. Whoever would save his/her life will lose it; but whoever loses his/her life for my sake & the Gospel's will save it." Here we see how Jesus laid out the conditions & the costs of being His disciples. Most leaders/masters demand their prospective disciples to have certain skills or pass particular tests. We might assume that Jesus does not have any test or condition for us to follow in His footsteps. But, He does! His condition is very simple, namely, denying ourselves & taking up our daily crosses for his sake. He wants us to embrace His lifestyle & follow His way of the Cross. If we don't follow that simple requirement, we would never make it to the end & truly be His disciples.

However, our human instinct does not like crosses; & it tells us to avoid them at all costs. Now, Jesus calls us to embrace our daily crosses & follow in His footsteps. His new teaching certainly has caused human resistance & made a huge clash with our human instinct. Again, this Sunday's Gospel shares with us that encounter between Jesus & Peter as following, "...He [Jesus] then began to teach them [His disciples] that the Son of Man had to suffer much, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, & the scribes, be put to death, & rise three days later. Peter then took Him aside & began to remonstrate with Him. At this He turned around &, eyeing the disciples, reprimanded Peter in turn: 'Get out of my sight, you Satan! You are not judging by God's standards, but by human's!'" As you can see, Jesus clashed with Peter on the issue of suffering & the Cross. Evidently, Peter did not like any suffering & the Cross & tried to talk Jesus out of it. Ironically Peter just gave a great spiritual insight about Jesus' true identity & received high praises from our Lord. But, that great insight did not help Peter understand Jesus' new teaching about suffering & the Cross & support it. So, how do you feel about our suffering & the Cross? Do think there is a purpose & meaning to it?

I'm sure we have all heard the saying, "No pain, no gain." That saying wants to remind us that if we do not work hard & endure all the pains & sufferings for what we believe in, we would not make any significant achievements & appreciate them in the end. When we work hard for something & make personal sacrifices for it, we show our real conviction & hope in it. A good example for this is our Lord's Cross & His belief in our human salvation. Jesus truly believed in our salvation & the promise of the eternal life to us. That is why He was willing to go through all the sufferings & carry the Cross to bring us the Easter miracle & the eternal life. Without the Cross & Good Friday, we would not have Easter Sunday. Similarly, we need to carry our daily crosses & endure all the persecutions for our Christian beliefs in this life if we would like to experience our own Easter miracle & have a share in the eternal life with Jesus someday. So, what does it mean to carry our daily crosses?

In this Sunday's Second Reading, St. James gives us an example of carrying our daily crosses as following, "...If a brother/sister has nothing to wear & has no food for the day, & one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, & eat well;' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James apparently calls us to be people of concrete actions & take care of the poor & the misfortunate. We cannot say that we follow in the footsteps of Jesus when we do not do good deeds every day & reach out to help the misfortunate around us. Remember that Jesus went from town to town help the misfortunate & reach out to feed the hungry. His disciples wanted to send the hungry crowd away & let them find food for themselves. But, Jesus called on His disciples to help feed them personally & let them witness the miracle of multiplication of the loaves. Doing that simple act of kindness without expecting anything in return is what it means to carry our daily crosses with Jesus. Unfortunately, we live in a selfish & greedy world where the rich want more for themselves while ignoring the plight of the poor & the social outcast. Sadly, our political & religious leaders do not only call on the public to do whatever they want but also fail to ask everyone to assist the poor & bear with one another. That is why we have seen more acts of violence & selfishness happen all over the place these days. Can you imagine what would happen to our world if our political & religious leaders would call on its members to carry their own daily crosses & follow their personal examples like Jesus did? We would surely have a totally different world compared to our current one!

Lastly, in testing our ability to carry our daily crosses at its highest level, prophet Isaiah put out this scenario to us in today's First Reading, "The Lord God opens my ear that I may hear; & I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets & spitting." My friends, can you imagine anyone of our political & religious leaders would turn their cheeks & tolerate all the spitting on them as prophet Isaiah suggested? They would certainly not, but our Lord did as He turned His cheek for people to slap & carried the Cross for the sake of our salvation. Once again, our Lord has set a shining example for us to follow & called us to a higher standard than the rest of the world. If we consider ourselves to be His disciples, we must do what He asks us & carry our daily crosses including turning the other cheek like Jesus did.

My dear brothers & sisters, none of us wants to endure suffering & carry our daily crosses. For we all wish to have a life free of all crosses & troubles. But, today Jesus reminds us that the way to follow Him & get to Heaven is through the Cross. That way helps us to be like Him & makes us to be humble & compassionate to other human beings, especially the poor & the misfortunate. So, let us listen to Jesus' teaching & pick up our daily crosses & follow in His footsteps.