

1. Read — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. Meditate — Now begin to reflect on the verses and ask God what it means and how he wants to speak to you through the passage. **God what are you saying to me through this?**

3. Pray — Respond from your heart to what God has been saying to you. **What do you want me to know?** Write down your prayer to him or record whatever he says to you.

4. Contemplate — Be quiet before the Lord enjoying His presence.
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**How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

# Quick Connect

**What is the Gospel saying? Mark 8:27-35** — Page 1

**What is the Church saying Past and Present?** Pages 1-3

**What is God saying to you through this passage?** Page 4

## **Gospel Reading – Mark 8:27-35 – Roman Missal**

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

## **Spiritual Reading - From Saint Cyprian, bishop and martyr**

Cyprian sends greetings to his brother Cornelius. My very dear brother, we have heard of the glorious witness given by your courageous faith. On learning of the honor you had won by your witness, we were filled with such joy that we felt ourselves sharers and companions in your praiseworthy achievements. After all, we have the same Church, the same mind, the same unbroken harmony. Why then should a priest not take pride in the praise given to a fellow priest as though it were given to him? What brotherhood fails to rejoice in the happiness of its brothers wherever they are? Words cannot express how great was the exultation and delight here when we heard of your good fortune and brave deeds: how you stood out as leader of your brothers in their declaration of faith, while the leader's confession was enhanced as they declared their faith. You led the way to glory, but you gained many companions in that glory; being foremost in your readiness to bear witness on behalf of all, you prevailed on your people to become a single witness. We cannot decide which we ought to praise, your own ready and unshaken faith or the love of your brothers who would not leave you. While the courage of the bishop who thus led the way has been demonstrated, at the same time the unity of the brotherhood who followed has been manifested. Since you have one heart and one voice, it is the Roman Church as a whole that has thus born witness. Dearest brother, bright and shining is the faith which the blessed Apostle praised in your community. He foresaw in the spirit the praise your courage deserves and the strength that could not be broken; he was heralding the future when he testified to your achievements; his praise of the fathers was a challenge

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to the sons. Your unity, your strength have become shining examples of these virtues to the rest of the brethren. Divine providence has now prepared us. God's merciful design has warned us that the day of our own struggle, our own contest, is at hand. By that shared love which binds us close together, we are doing all we can to exhort our congregation, to give ourselves unceasingly to fastings, vigils and prayers in common. These are the heavenly weapons which give us the strength to stand firm and endure; they are the spiritual defenses, the God-given armaments that protect us. Let us then remember one another, united in mind and heart. Let us pray without ceasing, you for us, we for you; by the love we share we shall thus relieve the strain of these great trials.

### Complicating Our Lives – Lesson and Discussion

*“You are thinking not as God does”*

There is a quote from the movie *Gettysburg* in which one of the characters criticizes his friend by saying, “You certainly do have a talent for trivializing the momentous and complicating the obvious.” “Jesus complicates our life in a way no other person can. He asks us to follow him through a complete identification of our will with his own. This is why following his sharp words to Peter, He told his Apostles: ‘If any man 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; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.’ (Mark 8:34-35).” [1]

**Why is Jesus demanding more from his followers, “If any man would come after me...”?** In the first part of the Gospel reading Jesus is testing their faith, “Who do you say that I am?” Now that Peter has spoken up to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, He pushes them to deepen their faith. Like the disciples, for us today, it is not enough to just say “Jesus Christ is Lord!” If we truly believe, we must live with him—our lives must be transformed in Him! “The Christian life, lived as it should be lived, with all its demands, is also a cross which one has to carry, following Christ. Jesus’ words, which must have seemed extreme to his listeners, indicate the standard he requires his followers to live up to. He does not ask for short-lived enthusiasm or occasional dedication; he asks everyone to renounce himself, to take up his cross and follow him.” [2]

### **What causes “short-lived enthusiasm” and “occasional dedication” and why is it bad for us?**

When we base our faith and life on feelings, we are building on a weak foundation. Feelings are short-lived; they come and go. Neither faith nor life should be based on feelings. The virtue of faith is a strong foundation because it is rooted in the eternal, which by nature is not “short-lived”. The Church tells us to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, but if we are only occasionally dedicated, we may just go when we “feel like it”. That occasional dedication also can plague our prayer life. Prayer is not to be just fit into our lives, but rather it is our communication with Jesus: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Saint Cyprian, in his letter to Saint Cornelius, repeats the saying of Saint Paul, “Let us pray without ceasing, you for us, we for you; by the love we share we shall thus relieve the strain of these great trials.” [3] Do we have a passion, a zeal, for prayer and liturgy?

**Can we have passion and zeal in the Christian life?** We are called to enthusiasm and joy, but the enthusiasm that Christ calls us to is not “short-lived” or shallow. Our life in Christ is life eternal, the opposite of short-lived! The beatitude: “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt 5:6) is not short-lived. When we hunger and thirst for physical food, the feeling is intense but then subsides. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, the intensity may be less, but it does not subside, for our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Jesus challenges the disciples to “come after me”, a challenge that invites them to life eternal and a life of enthusiasm.

**What does Jesus mean by “whoever wishes to saves his life will lose it”?** While it sounds complicated, Jesus makes it extremely easy for us. The only way to live forever is to follow him, and that means that we must die to our self. Here, Jesus uses the word “life” in a double sense: both earthly and eternal life. An earthly death brings about an end to the earthly life, but does not destroy the eternal life of the soul. “Understood in this way, we can grasp the paradoxical meaning of our Lord’s phrase: whoever wishes to save his (earthly) life will lose his (eternal) life. But whoever loses his (earthly) life for me and the Gospel, will save his (eternal) life. Life seen as mere self-centered earthly existence and lived in denial of Christ ends in destruction, but when lived in loyalty to Christ, despite earthly death, it arrives at fullness of life.” [4] To expound on this idea, in his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul says, “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” [5] Saint Paul in uses the word “living” and “sacrifice” together. Saint Paul is challenging us to be “living dead things”, we are dead to sin and self, but alive in Christ.

**What does saving one’s (earthly) life mean?** As it was said earlier, saving one’s life means to die to one’s selfish desires. “It means living this life as if there were none other – letting oneself be controlled by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” Instead of worrying so much about our earthly life, the “present life should be evaluated in the light of this eternal life: life on earth is not definitive, but transitory and relative; it is a means to be used to achieve definitive life in heaven.” [6]

**How do we know all of this (losing our life to save it) to be true?** We know because Jesus said and did everything He prophesied here. He in fact took up His cross, suffered persecution, and an earthly death. However, because of His obedience, He was raised on the third day and has power not only over souls, but also the power to raise up our earthly lives. We do not need to wait until our physical death to have our life raised up, though. Jesus elevates our life now. To live in sin is to be less alive since sin is a deprivation of good. Jesus says, “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” This abundant life is possible because of Jesus’s death. “In the Passion, the Cross ceased to be a symbol of punishment and became instead a sign of victory. The Cross is the emblem of the Redeemer: *in quo est salus, vita et resurrection nostra*: there lies our salvation, our life and our resurrection.” [7]