

## **September 16, 2018**

Is 50:5-9a; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

There are many burdens we all carry. It doesn't matter how old you are - young people have some kinds of challenges, older people others. People in an undeveloped part of the world have difficulties that others do not, and those in the developed world have a set of cares that those in the third world are free from. What one person may carry with ease, another is weighed down terribly by. Our location, our age, who we are - all these help to define what things in life will be a burden to us. Human life has difficulties and struggles, and it is unrealistic to think that any changes in location, any amount of money, or hours of worry will prevent us from having struggles in life. That is a sobering truth, however today we look at another truth that helps to not let these things crush us.

Jesus knew about burdens in his life and in his death. In life Jesus Christ, God come to humanity, arrives at a time that isn't too comfortable - a primitive time with many hardships (and no internet, by the way). Jesus came to us at a time in history where life was difficult, to a people in a difficult part of the world, he had a mission that put him at odds with the power structure of the time. In his death he is horribly tortured, mocked, ridiculed, and painfully executed. When we meditate on the way of the cross - which surround us as these stations on the walls of the church - we are drawn to think about our own specific crosses, our own specific struggles, our own specific burdens - and what path God is asking us to take. Jesus is not ignorant to the fact that we have crosses to bear. Bearing crosses is inevitable, what Jesus says is to take up those crosses in life and follow him in the way he points out to us.

But what does Jesus mean in the Gospel when he says: *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me?* How do we follow him? Jesus says that we must "deny ourselves." He knows that when we hold to tightly to our own way doing things, when we try to find a way to escape bearing a cross by indulging our desires, or pleasuring ourselves - it does't work. This path only leads to greater crosses in this life. We can also loose heaven because we loose our faith in God and put faith in ourselves and the things of the world to conquer our difficulties and try to have no cross to bear. We come here to worship to deepen our relationship with Jesus through the Eucharist he commanded us to share, and to understand in the scripture, in the prayers of the Mass, and in our own personal prayer how to follow him. If

we are with Jesus he shoulders the burden with us and we find ways to endure and to manage our crosses. I have come to discover that when I patiently shoulder my crosses, follow God's law and the way the Lord is leading me, these crosses become lighter. If we are not with Jesus - if we go our own way, or the way pointed out by the world - we carry our crosses without him, and try in vein to control a world that keeps throwing us curveballs. We even may tell ourselves how terrible it is that we even have to bear any crosses - when we begin to think like that, we become bitter and loose our faith. That is what Jesus means today when he says: *For whoever wishes to save his life (in this earthly life) will lose it, (in the next) but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel (in this life) will save it (in the next)*. He's not just talking about losing our physical life as he and many martyrs have done, there are other ways to let go of our life.

We let go of this earthly life when we separate from our own desire to escape crosses, and when we take up a cross and follow our Lord. We loose this life when we let go of the attempt to place care of ourselves as top priority and the attempt to control the world so that we get maximum benefit - even at the expense of others who are needy. When we let go of this control, we have to have faith that God will be in control. In our second reading we heard James tell of the faith that he demonstrated: [You say] *You have faith and I have works. Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works*. When we let go of our own needs and we let go of our own attempts to control and prevent crosses - and trust that Jesus will bear with us any crosses that come - we see Jesus' presence, we increase our faith, and follow him to eternal life.

Of all the types of death that are possible (bodily death, spiritual death, death to our own way of doing things), Jesus is most concerned for the death of the spirit - that loss of the eternal life of the spirit in heaven - that eternal death where we are separated from the God who alone can satisfy us in that spiritual state. The prophet in the first reading prophesies about Jesus the one who died to his self-will and took up his cross following the way laid out for him and rose to new life: *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 and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced ... knowing that I shall not be put to shame*. Don't worry, have faith, Jesus is there when we follow him and that following brings a cross. In this Eucharist we follow the command of Jesus to worship together as a community, we listen to where he calls us to follow in faith, and we receive the nourishment of his body and blood that helps us bear any crosses that may come.