

In today's gospel, Jesus gives it to us straight: this is how life is. It does not conform to our fantasy of peace and grandeur. Those who lose their life will gain it, and those who wish to save their life will lose it. Take up your cross and follow him.

Jesus' bluntness needs a little unpacking. He begins with himself: Yes, he is the Christ as Peter proclaimed, but the disciples have the meaning of Christ all wrong. So Jesus instructs them: don't tell anybody until they understand what being the Christ entails.

He begins. Being the Christ means: suffering, rejection by all the important people, being killed and then rising after three days. As you can imagine, this did not sit well with the disciples.

Jesus teaches that he is going to lose his life and this will result in him gaining eternal life. He is giving his life away by loving others and speaking the truth. This will get him killed.

The Father will not let that be the end of him. It is only the beginning of eternal life.

Now the way Peter thinks of being the Christ: earthly power, popularity, possessions and prestige, that is the devil speaking.

Next Jesus teaches, as it is for Jesus, so it is for those who follow him.

Are you married? There is something that your parents didn't tell you: you are hard to live with.

We are the first cross we must bear. We have to get over ourselves. If we manage to get over ourselves, married life can lead to holiness when both spouses give 100%. In other words, your life is not about you.

As a couple, together you are to bless the world. If you don't get this at first, if you are blessed with children, they will drive home the point: by losing your life you will gain it.

Are you single? No escape here. Single people are called to holiness also. We too must get over ourselves. We must discover ways to give our lives away for others. Only then do we receive our lives.

Do you think that following Jesus is going to prevent pain and suffering? Wrong! Following Jesus calls us into solidarity with all the suffering of the world, and we will get our own dose along the way.

All of this is a blessing. It becomes the source of life giving love and grace. This is the straight truth about life.

Take up your cross and follow Jesus. It will lead through death to life.