

2021 September 12

## Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Reading:

**First:** Isaiah 50.5-9, "I did not hide my face from insult and spitting." (6b)

**The Psalm:** 116, "for you have delivered my soul from death." (8a)

**Second:** James 2.14-18, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have work?" (14)

**The Gospel:** Mark 8.27-35, "The Son of man must undergo much suffering, and be rejected by the elders" (31a)

### *Crown follows Cross*

Last week on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> we celebrated the nativity of our Blessed Mother. Two days from today on the 14<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate the glorification of the Cross. The next day we will remember our Blessed Mother as Our Lady of Sorrows. Cross refers originally to the suffering of Jesus and today it is the sign and symbol of our victory over death and our means of salvation from all evils, and frightening sign for Satan.

In the gospel today, Jesus for the first time discusses his eventual suffering and death. This discussion comes immediately after he was confessed by Peter as the Christ, the Messiah for which Peter gets from Jesus profuse praise and recognition. Peter was filled at that split second by the Holy Spirit to make this big confession of Jesus. This was the first time Jesus allows this revelation to happen to his disciples and the first time ever Jesus was revealed as the Messiah or as the One whom the Israelites were expecting for centuries.

However, at this euphoria the disciples could not just accept the revelation of suffering and death in the life of Jesus. For them their Jesus, who is so powerful, so divine and capable and works out signs and wonders and heals people of all kinds of deceases, cannot and must not suffer and die. For them this should not happen to Jesus! Peter 'rebukes' or better persuades Jesus to prevent it happening. It was an immediate support for Jesus and a challenge against his chosen path, a prompting by Peter to look for a plan B, other than suffering and death. Such a strong support from his dear disciple was sort of a detraction and distraction for Jesus to think alternately, a temptation, only for a split second, and immediately Jesus kicks Peter out of his way! Jesus reiterates the necessity for him to take up the cross and suffer unto death. This was the work assigned to him by the Father. He cannot and must not run away!

It was the Father's design from which Jesus cannot and must not run away, but just obey the Father to the very end. With this realization Jesus immediately invites all his followers to go after him in the same path of self-denial and carrying one's own the cross, and follow Jesus with exception to no one. He also introduces the difficult to understand truth and contrast of losing one's life to gain it. Isaiah vividly details the sufferings of the would-be Messiah. The psalmist foresees and recounts how the Messiah and any follower would feel the pangs of suffering and eventual deliverance of God. St James in the letter today highlights the point that faith is not an abstract concept but a working path. He powerfully states that faith without action and action without faith are of no use, that we must live our faith through our action and in loving relatedness to our sisters and brothers. Every word of the readings and the psalm today invites us to dive deep and come up with pearls to enrich our lives. Cross was the way of Jesus and also our way if we want to follow Jesus. There is no plan B.

*Fr. George*