

Homily - Year 22A - August 30, 2020

When was the last time that you had an original thought? Or perhaps, you are a smorgasbord thinker and pick and choose from the myriad of thoughts available on the net, on tv, on talk shows, in clubs, in bars, coffee shops, or in newspapers? You pick a thought and make it your own. Did having an original thought of your own scare you? Perhaps, too, the thoughts that you have mined and stolen from others now seem like your own.

Today's gospel presents us with two very original thoughts. They are so original that they may not have grabbed you because you have not yet made them your own. Here they are. They both come from who else but Jesus himself. "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." And the second: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." This second original thought has a corollary: "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Which political leader would get any votes if he ran on those thoughts, on that platform? Which business leader would be able to woo investors by proposing to them that they would have to suffer if they wanted to prosper?

Nevertheless, Jesus made those statements, and here we are today his disciples supposedly thinking as does God and taking up our cross.

See the world differently. That's what will happen if we start looking at things the way God does and not the way we do. But what's the difference? See the world as God does, not the way people see it. See others the way God does, not the way tv and radio talking heads do. See human weakness as God does, not as gossips do. Those are just a few ways.

But let me give a concrete, appropriate example as we come to the end of summer and think about the opening of school. Why did God make you? God made me to know, love, and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in heaven. That's God's answer to the question. Here's man's answer. You are here (notice the absence of God) to be successful in this world, to get a good job, to make lots of money, to retire happily, and perhaps go to eternal life if it exists. Big difference. God created us to be human beings, not human doings. Yes, our primary reason for existence is to be a child of God both now and into eternity. We

exist first of all to be people and secondarily to have jobs, activities, careers. Our greatest possession is ourselves. That's not being selfish. It's being realistic. If we do not have ourselves, then we have nothing to give to others. Let's make the example even more concrete. As we begin the school year, we should remember that the goal of education is primarily to educate, to form a person, not create a functionary. As I already said, we are to be human beings, persons, not human doings. We must think and do as God does.

Then, there is that "cross" thing that Jesus brings up. Uncomfortable, isn't it. Jesus does not say, "Look at the crosses of life and try to avoid them or get someone to fix them for you." He says to take them up. We spend so much time trying to avoid the crosses of life rather than just taking them up, with Jesus at our side, and facing them. Here's a concrete example, especially for parents and grandparents. Your middle names are not "fix it." You can't spend your lives fixing the crosses your children must face, not matter how old those children are. Help your children carry the cross; make them understand that the cross is part of life. There are just some things that we have to live through rather than making them go away. We have to teach our young to conquer the bumps, the crosses, of life not to skirt them.

The crosses we face may not replicate the cross of Jesus. Our crosses have different names, names like pandemic, racism, looting, pillaging, hurricanes, politics, crumbling family life, cancel culture, loss of faith in a loving God, and who knows what else.

Notice that Jesus does not say take up your cross all by yourself. He says "follow me." In other words, we are not alone in taking up our crosses as did Jesus. Remember, too, that Jesus' victory over death came through the cross, taking up the cross, not by avoiding the cross.

Believe it or not, we are coming to the end of a beautiful summer, time for us to face the ordinariness of life, even though because of the pandemic our lives are not ordinary. Face that life as Jesus taught us: see the world as God sees it and take up the crosses as did Jesus.