



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

June 28, 2020

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**TAKE UP YOUR CROSS!** According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC), the effects of COVID-19 on the health of racial and ethnic minority groups is still emerging. But current data suggest a disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups. A recent CDC report (CDC MMWR report) which included race and ethnicity data from 580 COVID-19 patients hospitalized found that 45% of individuals for whom race, or ethnicity data was available were white, while this group comprised of 59% of the surrounding community. Nonetheless, 33% of hospitalized patients were black, compared to 18% in the community, and 8% were Hispanic, compared to 14% in the community. Such data suggest an over-representation of blacks among hospitalized patients. According to the CDC, the factors that influence the health of a racial and ethnic minority group are living conditions; working conditions; and underlying health conditions. These are the present effect of slavery, racial and ethnic discrimination in this country. It is the cross of the nation, the church, and every person who calls upon the name of the Lord. This is a right to life issue. Love of God and love of neighbor makes the cross bearable. Christians, pick up your cross.

Chapter 10 of Matthews gospel can be described as a training manual for discipleship. Jesus commissioned the disciples and gave them practical advice for ministry and warned them of persecutions In verses 26-33, Jesus even addressed their fears. He told them not to fear their persecutors (v. 26-28). It is interesting to note that these lessons on discipleship and the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter 5 are the same.

One of the hardest lessons of discipleship is carry the cross of daily life in a way that resembles the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He taught that the burden of the cross is made lighter with love. Beginning with verse 39, Jesus teaches that the disciples must love one another, but love Him more. This is an extraordinary instruction that shows how important obedience and “discipline” are to the disciple. To love Jesus more than parents does not void the Fourth Commandment, or the natural love of parents for their children and children for parents. Rather, the love that is required for discipleship is a love that is higher and has a greater claim than natural love of family. This is the cross of discipleship, to reflect the love of God, and the love of Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. Therefore, if we love God, we will also love those around us. We can take up the cross of discipleship.

Taking up one’s cross for Jesus’ sake does not mean tolerating racism or other demeaning conditions. Rather, it means putting Jesus first as we struggle against injustice. In this sense, every disciple of Jesus Christ bears the same cross. This is the first mention of the crucifixion in the Gospel of Matthew. Since crucifixion was a horrible death reserved for non-Roman criminals, there is no doubt the mention of crucifixion would have helped His disciples realize that their calling would also involve pain and shame. Those who find (i.e., *preserve*) their lives now, will forfeit them later. Conversely, the disciple who loses his or her life (Gr. psyche) by martyrdom or by self-denial now, will find (*preserve*) it in the next stage of his or her existence. The person who lives for the present loses the real purpose of life. He or she also loses the reward for faithful living. Therefore, we show our love for God by bearing the cross of working against injustice by keeping the love of Jesus always before us. So, ask yourselves, how do you bring Love into the world when you are hated for doing so?