

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 15, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 50:4-9	The Servant of the Lord will face suffering with confidence.
James 2:14-18	We witness to what we believe by the way we live.
Mark 8: 27-35	Jesus identifies the Messiah as one who will suffer and die.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Mark:

We have come to a crucial place in Mark’s Gospel. This is the turning point: Jesus is identified as Messiah but a Suffering Messiah -- one who will have to die before he can be raised to life by God. In Mark, whatever is said of Jesus is also said of the disciples. They, too, will follow his path and carry the cross of suffering and dying before they can come to the glory of their own resurrection.

Peter represents the Christian community, both in his profession of faith and in his misunderstanding of the faith. We, too, are most willing, even eager at times, to proclaim what we believe about Jesus. But most of the time, we are only half ready to follow through with the implications of what we say, especially when it calls us to follow the redeeming suffering of the Savior.

Jesus says to the Church, too, what he said to Peter: “Get in line behind me; walk in my path; go where I will lead.” Father Eugene Laverdiere and other Scripture scholars believe that the usual translation is not correct. It is not “Get thee behind me, you Satan.” Or “Get out of my sight, you Satan.” The meaning, rather, is that Peter (and the Church) should get behind Jesus to follow him wherever he will go! Follow me to the cross so that you may have life everlasting.

Will the Christian community ever be willing to hear the call of Jesus to a kind of discipleship which is patterned on the model of the Master himself? Oh, how we would rather be a Church of power and prestige, of success and influence, rather than a Church which identifies with the poor, the homeless, the sick, the oppressed and the downtrodden! Are we ready to prefer suffering so as to be like the Master? Perhaps, we will always need to be rebuked like Peter: to be called a Satan, before we are willing to pay attention to the Lord.

Peter answered correctly when he said that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. But he needs to grow to more maturity before he can accept that Jesus must die and that he, too, must die. It is too easy for us to accept a Messiah who will usher us into the kingdom of God in heaven. There is a task to be accomplished before we enter into that kingdom. We have a mission to follow. We must walk where Jesus walked. We must come to the same end that he

came to. If Jesus is the Messiah and we are his disciples, then we must follow him all the way. We will have to pay a high price for discipleship. To live and to die like Christ is our destiny. His resurrection will be our resurrection.

Isaiah:

There are four Servant Songs in Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). This is the third. The Servant refers to Israel. The Messiah will be the fulfillment of that ideal to which the whole of Israel is called. Israel would have to suffer great humiliation and pain in the Babylonian Exile. The Church, too, has had and will have times of testing. We who are the Church in our time will endure much to be compared to the Lord who is the servant of all. But God will prevail and the suffering will be lifted up. We see a foreshadowing of the Passion and resurrection of the Savior. We have a hint that the Prophet is calling us to our own Passion and our resurrection.

James:

Catholics and Protestants have long disagreed over the meaning of faith. The Protestant tradition has favored the meaning taken from Paul's Letters: "A total, loving relationship of surrender to the Lord." The Catholic tradition has tended to favor the meaning found in the Letter of James: faith means "the beliefs that we hold to be true because they are revealed by God." Of course, faith means both of those, not one or the other. And works flow from what we believe. A faith truly alive will issue forth in works that are pleasing to God. Gospel living indicates that we work for God. Works come from faith.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share with your group the several ways in which your group could become more welcoming and supportive of people who are suffering any distress right in your own community. Work out two or three suggestions that could be implemented in your parish in order to make it more faithful to the call of Jesus that we "get behind him" and follow in his footsteps.
2. The Suffering Servant does not retaliate. Identify some groups you may know who have endured great pain without striking back at the perpetrator. Disciples need to do the works of their master. What are the works that we can do today to identify with our master?
3. We have good days and bad days as we endeavor to be close to the Savior. List all the good days and see whether there might not be a thread that ties them together. Can you pick out the attitudes in you that may seem to make God close to you? We need to remember that God is always close. How can we become aware of how close God is to us?

PRAYER

Use Psalm 116 for prayer, having each person praying one verse. At the end of each verse, with each person adding an intercession, such as:

"From the desire for power and prestige, deliver us, O Lord."

"From the desire for wealth and possessions, deliver us, O Lord."

"From the desire of winning, deliver us, O Lord."

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Christian faithful have tried to find meaning in their own experience of suffering, of pain, and of loss in this world. They look to the Savior, of course, as their model and their teacher. St. Paul offers a motive with which we can find value in the sufferings we all must endure, even in our own dying. In Colossians 1:24, Paul says that in his flesh he is completing “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.”

Whatever could be lacking in Christ’s suffering? The suffering of Christ’s members will be lacking in the suffering of the whole body of Christ as long as any member will withhold his/her own suffering from the fullness of Christ’s redeeming will and purpose. We can choose to join our pain to the Passion and death of our Savior and, thus, add to the fulfilling of Christ’s self-sacrifice, or we can withhold.

Because of our baptism, we have been consecrated into a relationship with Christ that goes deeper than mere association. We are joined to Christ in such a way that what happens in our bodies happens in the body of Christ himself. In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, we celebrate a further consecration so that our suffering takes on the value of sharing in the saving Passion of the Lord. We actively participate in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

In more than one instance, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to us as having been consecrated, of experiencing a renewal of consecration, of living as consecrated persons in the presence of God. Our Catholic faith teaches that we are truly justified by the Passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. We have been made sacred unto God. Now, we know that this God-given sacredness works for the redemption of others as we share in the Communion of Saints. We share in the Communion of the Saints because of our baptism.

See: Catechism #1508, 1521, 1535, 946-948.

See also Saint John Paul II’s encyclical: “On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering”

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