

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fr. Ray Morency

Luke 9:18-24

At all our Masses the priest says, "Pray my brothers and sisters that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God the almighty Father." After the priest says that, we might ask ourselves, "Have we, in fact, made a sacrifice?" Part of being Catholic and Christian is to live a life of sacrificial love. In our reading today, Jesus speaks about picking up His cross and says to us, also, "Pick up your cross and follow Me." Will we follow the path of the cross? Will we be disciples of Christ or be merely content with being an admirer of Jesus?

There is a church that has a crucifix that is 27 feet tall and the corpus on it is 12 feet tall. The entrance of the church is arranged in a way that you don't see the crucifix until you are actually fully in the church itself. The body is pretty graphic with the wounds very visible. Visitors are stunned when they look at it. It is obvious by looking at the crucified body of Jesus that He is suffering greatly. That makes visitors as well as most non-Catholics ask, "Why do we keep such a body on the cross?"

Protestants and other Christians argue that since Christ rose from the dead that the cross should be empty with no corpus on it or there should be a resurrected body on it if there is anything at all. Our reply to non-Catholics is that, yes, it is true that Jesus rose but that makes it look like the journey is over. Having a corpus on our crosses in the Catholic Church reminds us that we are still on a journey and that Jesus expects us to take that journey towards Him during our lives. Our journey is never over.

Walking the path of Jesus was not just for the Twelve. Anyone who seeks salvation needs to live in a way that imitates the life of Christ. It is the Christian way, the Catholic way, to want to walk in the footsteps of Christ. That path has to be a daily choice. None of us like the word sacrifice. Part of the sacrifice we are expected to take part in is to 'not do' some things.

For example, some of the things to avoid are the seven deadly sins of pride, anger, lust, greed, gluttony, envy and sloth.

Now I'm not going to go over these sins one by one; there isn't enough time to do that. But I will point out one in particular that connects to many of the other sins. One of those sins is pride. Pride is often the sin that leads us to the temptation to be part of the inner circle. There is in all of us a deep-seated need to feel superior to others in some way. Other examples are to look at our wealth and possessions and feel that what I have makes me better than you. Or, my education puts me in a higher class than you. Or, my religious beliefs make me holier than you. Or, my physical strength makes you weaker than me so I'm better. Or, you're different in nationality so you are inferior to me. The last one I mentioned leads to another sin which is being prejudiced.

Not too long ago in a small Midwestern town, a student killed two other students in retaliation because they called him a 'pizza face' because he had a severe case of acne. Belittling others is part of being prejudiced and takes away peace and causes hardship. Christians who truly follow Jesus receive the graces that wipe away the film of prejudice and pride from our eyes and help us to see every human being as a person to love. St. Paul tells us that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is no male or female. But we are all one in Christ if we follow him.

Yes, certain things have to be put aside in order to walk the path of Jesus Christ. This might be seen in the way we choose to use our money, the type of work we choose to do and whether or not we choose to volunteer for a program where we are needed. Following the Cross of Christ is a daily choice to deny all those things that keep us from God.

The crucifix was never meant to be a gross reminder of an execution. It is a reminder that nothing, not even our very lives, is more important than the path to God. The crucifix is an invitation and inspiration to follow in God's footsteps.

Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow Me." Are we listening to that call?