

There's a story from the Civil Rights Movement days about someone in a town for one of Dr. Martin Luther King's marches, and he tells a marcher how much he admires Dr. King. The marcher invites him to join the march, but he replies "Oh no, I could get hurt doing that. I'm an admirer, not a follower." That's the kind of thing going on in the Gospel we just heard.

Many times it seems Peter is slow to catch on. But when Jesus tells his disciples that he's going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, Peter connects some of the dots. That would mean Jesus's disciples may also suffer and die. That's why he tries to talk Jesus out of thinking that way.

Right before this incident, Peter correctly told Jesus that he was the Christ, the *Messiah*. But he was wrong about what that means.

Jesus wasn't going to meet the Jewish people's' expectations of a political *Messiah* who'd kill all the Romans and bring Judea back to its glory days. Jesus makes clear he'll be the Father's idea of the *Messiah*: the perfect sacrifice, who'd make up for all the sins of the world, because only God himself can be that sacrifice. The Father's Messiah re-opens heaven's doors for us.

Jesus's followers also have to take up their cross if they're to enter those doors. That forces the earlier question on each one of us: Am I just an admirer of Jesus, or a follower of Jesus?

If we're followers who take up our cross, it cross comes to us 2 ways: when it's forced on us, and when we willingly carry one out of love for Christ.

The crosses that are forced on us are the suffering we incur from people or institutions that are broken, or from mother nature who is broken. Then we'll carry the cross of disappointment, the cross of frustration, the cross of unfairness, the cross of grief. These crosses appear after we have desires or make plans that we think are consistent with God's will, and then our plans go unfulfilled because somebody or something thwarts us, or obstacles stop us, or someone dies or gets hurt or moves away. These crosses bring us to tears.

We can cry that we didn't get what we wanted, and we can be sad. But we can receive our suffering better than unbelievers do: because we can trust that our best-made plans somehow conflicted with God's will, and trust that God plans something better for us because he loves us, and we want to do his will.

Knowing that helps us accept suffering that's inescapable, and keeps us from getting stuck in bitterness or passing it on to others. We can mourn our losses, let 'em go, receive new spirit, and look forward to the surprises ahead. If we truly believe in the Resurrection, we can receive suffering more positively.

The other type of cross we carry is out of love for Christ, when we carry the burdens of doing justice like Jesus did, when we continue his ministry. That's what St. James gets at in the Second Reading: faith without works is lifeless. Faith in Christ saves us for eternal life; doing good works expresses our faith.

Good works don't save us on their own; they are evidence that our faith is alive. Caring for the poor as best we can; responding to someone's needs ahead of ourselves; sharing our time, talents and treasure to benefit others; and forgiving others, identifies us as followers of Jesus, not just admirers. It's what Jesus means when he says in today's Gospel "whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

We carry our cross awaiting surprises, especially the big one, the Resurrection, knowing that nothing is impossible for God. That's how we can carry our cross, live in trust and not stay bitter.

Fr. John Ozella, Pastor

Christ the King

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