

Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 13th, 2009

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Good morning. Today Jesus isn't very affirming of Peter, is He? He wasn't nice to him at all. Peter at least took Jesus aside. But do you notice what Jesus does? He rebukes him in front of everybody. And then He calls him Satan. Nice! "Get behind Me Satan!" And then His next line is what? "You think as man and not as God." And so often we get that same mindset. We want to look at the Church. We want to look at Jesus. We want to look at the world. We want to look at everything through the mind of man instead of through the mind of God. We want everything to be given to us. We want God to be gentle with us. We want everything to be nice. Give me what I want. Love me the way I want to be loved and that is it. But that is not the Gospel. Here Jesus after He rebukes him in front of everyone, He embarrasses the heck out of him. Could you imagine? If I was to do that to one of you, and I think I have once or twice, didn't everybody talk about it? Can you imagine Father? It would really be bad. It would give you something to talk about all week or a couple of weeks however long that lasts when you are talking about me because I did something stupid.

But here Jesus does it on purpose and then after that He gives teaching to them. He says, "No one can be My follower unless he denies himself, picks up his cross and follows in my footsteps." And then He says, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake and the sake of the Gospel will find it." That is an altogether different way of looking at life. It is about giving your life away. It is about dying. It is about denying yourself. Then if you listened to the Second Reading today from James he is arguing with people who say all you have to do is believe. The fight has always been what do you have to have, faith or works? Protestants have always focused on faith. Catholics have always focused on faith and works not just the other. You need both.

Once I got into an argument, can you imagine me arguing with somebody, but they were trying to get one of my kids who I was his Confirmation sponsor and this guy owned a restaurant in Erie. He doesn't own it anymore. Anyway he was trying to save this kid who was Catholic and I was his sponsor from the whore of Babylon, the Catholic Church. He was trying to save this kid. He says to this kid again and again, "The only thing you have to do is believe in Jesus and you are going to be fine." I looked at that kid and I said, "That is a lie." I am arguing with this guy and I said, "So you believe that you can walk into a Burger King, McDonalds or wherever, pull out a machine gun, blow everybody away, boom, boom, boom, take that gun blow your brains out and you are going right to heaven?" "Absolutely," He says, "Because my salvation is in Jesus Christ. It is not in me." I said, "That is a lie from the darkest pit of hell. Your salvation is in Christ Jesus. We all believe we are saved by grace, free gift of God. But you prove that you are saved by grace by what you do." That is what James is talking about.

These people that believe that hey all I have to do is believe and that is okay are going to be quite surprised because that is not what Jesus said. Jesus did not say today just believe in Me and you are going to be fine. When people use the line, "Hey have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior," what does that mean? That is what you need to be saved, true? No because when someone asked Jesus what

must you do to be born again, what did Jesus say? You have to accept Me as your Lord and Savior, no, He said what? "No one can enter the kingdom of Heaven," John chapter 3 verse 5, "No one can enter the kingdom of Heaven unless you are born again." "How can you be born again?" says Nicodemus? He says, "You must be born of water and the Spirit." You have got to be baptized. That is what Christ said. So when we come to argue about points of religion let us not look at the theologians, let us look at Jesus. Jesus said, "You can't be My follower unless you deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow in My steps every day." That is what He said.

So how do we make this practical? How do we deny ourselves? I told you not too long ago when I was at Christ the King Seminary. When I was trying to find a place to go to for Major Seminary my soon to be spiritual director, her name was Sr. Joan Wagner, and Sr. Joan, I will never forget in class, we are sitting in Spirituality Class. She was talking about Jesus and she says, "You know when Jesus says to deny your very self He says you need to deny your own thoughts even." She said, "So the goal in your life or in the spiritual life is the first thing when you wake up in the morning you will be thinking about Jesus instead of thinking about yourself or thinking about how early it is. Or thinking about what you have got to do today; or thinking about all of the trials that are going to come to you that day. If you start the day thinking about self you are going to end the day thinking about self. The whole day will be focused on self. But Jesus says, "Deny yourself." So how do you do that? I thought then, "How could you, how could anybody wake up and the first thing you think about is Jesus Christ? How is that even possible?" Then I found out how it could be possible.

I have told you a thousand, thousand times how is it possible to make God the last thing you think about the first thing you think about? What practical thing can you do? No Bible, no breakfast. No Bible, no bed. So what do you do? The way that you do it is you keep your Bible next to your bed so that the very last thing that you do is before you go to bed, because your Bible is right there, last thing you do is you pick up that word and you read from it and go to sleep. All of eight hours you are meditating on it and what God said to you. Practice first thing when you wake up in the morning. The Bible is right next to you. It is right on your nightstand. Pull it out. Look at it. The first thing that happens is God speaking to you. You end your day with God. You begin your day with God. You begin your day with God, you end your day with God. You are denying yourself for God. Very practical, bible next to your bed stand. Interesting because I talked about this before, if I was to let you go home but I beat you home, I get to your house I run into your bedroom and I look. Hmmmm...I wonder how many Bibles would be next to your bed, right there? Some of you I bet you it would happen. But I will bet you 90% of you would not. "I hate you Father. You use guilt a lot Father." Hey, whatever works, is what I say. Anyway you have got to deny yourself and it begins with how you begin your morning and how you end your day with the Word of God.

The second thing to pick up your cross means a couple of things. The first thing it means is that the crosses that come in your life you accept them. When you accept the cross what do you do with it? You carry it but then you also, those of you who are older were taught to do this when something bad happens, you offer it up. You offer it up. You offer it up and you unite yourself with Christ on the cross. So something bad happens to you, you have a headache; you have got a toothache; someone said something bad about you; someone hurt your feelings, what do you do? Offer it up. Lord I unite this

with Your suffering on the cross. And I unite my suffering to your suffering. And when You and I unite our suffering with Christ's suffering, what do we do? Do you remember what Paul said it was just this week in the Readings? "We fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." How can there be anything lacking in the suffering of Christ? There isn't. What happens is Christ unites Himself with us. As long as one person in the world is a Christian suffers, Christ is always on that cross, is He not? Remember when Paul was persecuting Christ, was persecuting Christians? Jesus appeared to Him and what did He say? "Saul, Saul why do you persecute Me?" Whatever happens to one of His followers happens to Christ. So when we unite our sufferings, the pains of life that come towards us, the sicknesses, the hurts, and we unite them with Christ we pick up our cross with Him and we become one with Him on the cross.

And finally we have got to follow in His footsteps. And to follow in the footsteps of Christ, the Opening Prayer talked about it. Christ was a servant. He gave every day. He gave His life away. If we are truly going to be His followers. We just can't say, "Jesus my Savior." Yes He is. We have got to live it. And the way we live it is we give our life away for others. So to make it practical every day we need to think did I do one unselfish act for another human being today? An unselfish act means that you don't get anything back from it. You don't help someone out and say now they owe me. Now they are going to help me out. If you help someone out and hope they are going to help you back. That was not an unselfish act. You are planning on future times. An unselfish act is an act where you do it with no expectation of return. Christ went to the cross and died for you and me even when we didn't even know Him or give anything back to Him.

So when it comes to Christ we are saved by grace. But that grace must be lived through our faith in Christ and the way we live our works. And we make that explicit by the words of Jesus, Himself. "No one can be My disciple unless he himself, picks up his cross and follows in My steps. I gave you three ways to do it. Hopefully you will. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.