

Homily of 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (09-16-18)

The first reading is Prophet Isaiah's prophesy about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheek to those who pluck my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame." In the Gospel of today Jesus referred to Prophet Isaiah, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days."

The first reading, in a figurative way, describes the various kinds of affliction we go through in our effort to live good Christian life. There will be times when our backs will be beaten, our beard plucked, our face buffeted and spat upon. During the time of any affliction we are to set our face like flint, that is, we are to keep faith and believe that our God will not allow us to be put to shame. St. Paul writes, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you" (Romans 8:11).

Jesus, then, sets the standard for us, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it." This means that those who live sinful life in order to have better life on earth will lose eternal life. But those who lose their life because they die to sin will gain eternal life. Luke 17:33 puts it this way, "Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it." Jesus in John 12:24 explains further, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

The Gospel says, "Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'" At that moment, Peter was a voice of discouragement in the mission of Jesus. Jesus immediately quietened the voice of discouragement. If Jesus, who is God, encountered difficulties, criticisms, oppositions, sufferings, and frustrations; then, the same experiences await us who are his followers. When these experiences come our way, may we not be discouraged. May we draw strength from Jesus. On the other hand, let us not be voices of discouragement to anyone by our words and actions.

St. James instructs us in the second reading that "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Every Christian needs to evaluate oneself periodically and ask oneself; apart from the good works one does for one's family, relatives, friends, in work or in business places, what good work does one do to people in need, especially strangers and those who cannot pay back? Jesus says in Luke 6:32-35, "For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit [is] that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High..."

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