



Contributed by Father Paul Voisin, C.R.

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TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
September 12, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

A few years ago, there was a great outpouring of emotion and grief, throughout the world, at the horrendous photo of the lifeless body of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, on a beach in Greece. The loss of the life of this young boy, his brother and sister, and their mother, in their escape from Syria, through Turkey, on their way to Greece, held out the promise of freedom, even the possibility of joining an aunt and her family in British Columbia.

The loss of any life is a tragedy, in particular that of a young and innocent life.

In the gospel today Jesus tells us that we must “lose our life” in order to save it. Sounds confusing? Our reflection on the readings will help us to put into context this call of the Lord, and leave no confusion.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Sometimes such public exhibitions of death, as described above (and I am sure you can think of many more) tug on our heartstrings. We feel sadness and sorrow, compassion and empathy, anger and outrage. The loss of life is always a ‘hard pill to swallow’.

- a) How do you react to such public displays of suffering and death?
- b) Over time, have such images hardened my heart or desensitized me to this reality?
- c) How does this influence our initial understanding (misunderstanding?) of losing our life, as Jesus speaks of in the gospel?

The Table of the Word

I am sure that we have all heard the expression ‘fair weather friend’, and have perhaps experienced it in our own lives – a person who is our friend and is happy to be with us until a moment arrives that they disappear from our sight. This could be caused by significant changes in the relationship, which put more strain on each of the two people – the loss of a job, an accusation against them, a terminal illness, financial difficulties, etc. Sometimes the apostles of Jesus were ‘fair weather friends’. They were happy to be associated with Him when He gave wise speeches, when He healed someone who was sick, or raised someone from the dead. However, as we see in the gospel, Peter was ready to ‘bail’ on Jesus when He began talking about rejection, suffering and death. It was so apparent that Jesus told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God’s way but mans’.” I am sure that this was a wake-up call to Peter, causing him to think about this future that Jesus was speaking of, and how it was not part of his plan for Jesus. This was evident even to a greater degree when, after his arrest, all the disciples abandoned Jesus – ‘fair weather friends’ – and even when Peter did show up, he denied that he knew Jesus, true to the prophecy of Jesus. A true friend is with us in good times and in bad, in plenty and in famine. This is a challenge for us, in our human condition, to be true friends to the people in our lives, and to be true followers/friends of Jesus, the Lord.

Penitential Rite:

Jesus invites us into relationship with Him. Like Peter, we are asked who He is to us, and to follow Him, in good times and in bad.

Lord Jesus, help me to profess you as “the Christ”,
Christ Jesus, may our “works” profess You,
Lord Jesus, allow our “dying” to lead to life,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray:

Almighty God,
who calls us into friendship with You,
and Your Son, and the Holy Spirit,
give us wisdom and courage
to follow You faithfully,
and to share this graced life with the people in our lives.
We ask this in the name of Jesus,
whom we profess as the Christ,
in union with the Holy Spirit,
now and forever.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Isaiah 50:5-9)

The Lord God has opened my ear. For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle.

The Lord God comes to my help, so that I am untouched by the insults. So, too, I set my face like flint; I know I shall not be shamed.

My vindicator is here at hand. Does anyone start proceedings against me? Then let us go to court together. Who thinks he has a case against me? Let him approach me.

The Lord God is coming to my help; who dares condemn me?

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (James 2:14-18)

Take the case, my brothers, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith. Will that faith save him?

If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, "I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty," without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it; it is quite dead.

This is the way to talk to people of that kind: "You say you have faith and I have good deeds; I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds – now you prove to me that you have faith without any good deeds to show."

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL (Mark 8:27-35)

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

COMMENTARY:

In the First Reading we are introduced to the “Suffering Servant,” this prophecy of the promised one who will come. This is the Lord Jesus, who fulfills this prophecy. He is the faithful one who was tormented and beaten before His death. As God-made-human He kept firm to His mission, and was single-minded in doing the will of the Father. He knew what was “right”, and no one could “prove Him wrong”. There is also an aspect of the Lord as an advocate, who is on our side, who is with us to defend us, and who “goes to court” with us.

Our Second Reading continues the teaching of the apostles to the early Christian communities. He admonishes that their faith in Jesus Christ is not only an intellectual statement, but should bear fruit, the fruit of charity and compassion. These “works” continue the saving works of Jesus.

In today’s Gospel, the words of Jesus may confuse and dismay us, because He says that “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it”. I assure you: Jesus does not want us to “lose” our life, in the sense of dying. I believe that this “loss” of life that Jesus is referring to is that complete giving over of ourselves – following His example. Just as Jesus poured out His life for us in His life and ministry, and His suffering, death and resurrection, so, too, we are called to pour out our lives in love and service of God. To follow Jesus means conforming our life to the life of Jesus. To follow Jesus means “dying” to dreams and promises of the world, and rising to a new life in Him – to new values, attitudes, activities, things, and even friendship. The process of coming to embrace this new life in Christ is beautifully expressed by Jesus as “taking up our cross, and following Him”. Immediately this image strikes us, because of the difficulty and challenge this involves. This new life in Christ is not the result of sitting back, observing or hoping for the best. This new life in Christ implies letting go of some things, and embracing others – letting go of our sinfulness, selfishness and pride, and embracing a life of grace, a life of self-giving, and a life of humility. This is a day-by-day living in union with Christ, confronting our sinfulness, and experiencing new freedom over sin and death. Just as Jesus’ carrying of His cross was an exercise in blood, sweat and tears, we can expect that our carrying of our cross – in union with Christ – will also be an exercise in blood, sweat and tears.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. “The Lord God comes to my help” (Isaiah 50:5-9)

There is a sense of advocacy in this reading, God assuring us that He is with us, on our side, and accompanies us, even “to the courts”. What a great sense of security this gives us, to know that we are not alone, and that God is with us to protect and guide us.

- a) How does this dramatic image of the “Suffering Servant” help me as I face difficulties and trials, in union with Christ?
- b) How have I felt that “the Lord God” has “come to my help”?
- c) Have I experienced Jesus, in fulfillment of this prophecy, being my advocate?

2. “I will prove to you that I have faith by showing you my good deeds” (James 2:14-19)

Faith is not only an intellectual exercise, dogmas and teachings. Faith produces a change in one’s life, one’s priorities and one’s deeds. St. James highlights the importance of our “good deeds” as profound expressions of a lively faith in Jesus Christ.

- a) How do my “good deeds” reflect my faith life?
- b) How have the “good deeds” of others contributed to my life and, in particular, my life of faith?
- c) Do I have any apostolic involvement with the poor and needy in my neighbourhood, parish community or municipality?

3. “But anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:27-35)

No one wants to “lose” their life. We go to great ends to protect and maintain the gift of life, our life and those of our loved ones. Yet, to live in Christ we are called to “lose” our life “for the sake of the gospel” in order to “save it”.

- a) How am I conscious of “losing” my life?
- b) How have I experienced my life being “saved” because I took the risk to “lose it”?
- c) How do I “renounce myself”, “take up my cross and follow” Jesus?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: *(15-20 minutes)*

1. Word of the Week: “Take up your cross and follow”

2. Suggestions for the Week:

The “loss” of life that Jesus is talking about is not a once-in-a-lifetime moment or experience. “Taking up the cross” is not a one-time action. “Following” Jesus is not restricted to a physical movement with our feet.

This week, be aware of the times you are called to “take up your cross”, when there is an inconvenience or a disappointment, when there are raised tempers and voices, when there are hurt feelings and hurtful words. There are so many occasions in our week that these “crosses” are before us. If we side-step them, deny them, or avoid them, we will not resolve anything, least of all will we be an active agent in changing a reality that is harmful, hurtful, and not representative of our following of Jesus, the Lord. Be conscious of “taking up your cross” this week, with the grace of God, and the transformation it brings in you, and in those over whom you have influence

and power. The Lord is present, and His grace is abundant, if we accept the challenge – day by day – to follow Him in this way.

3. Intercessions:

We do not pray in vain. Our prayers not only express to God our needs, and the needs of those we love, but they help to orient us to cooperating with God's grace to bring about the answer to our prayer. If we are not an instrument of God's will in our prayer, then we are an obstacle.

That we will accept the challenge to “lose our life” in relation to all thoughts and feelings, things and activities, and even friendships, that take us away from union with God. We pray ... **Be with us, Lord**

That, as God advocates for us, we will advocate for others in need of God's love and protection. We pray ... **Be with us, Lord**

That we will not be “fair weather friends,” but will be beacons of love and support for those in need, in times of difficulty and trial. We pray ... **Be with us, Lord**

That people may recognize our good deeds as being signs of our faith in God, and be moved to action by our witness to faith. We pray ... **Be with us, Lord**

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray:
Lord God,
our source of strength in times of trial,
our source of joy in times of victory,
be with us as we journey to You.
Help us to accept the challenge of each day,
losing our life for Your sake,
carrying our cross,
and following Your Son.
May we never doubt that You are with us,
and Your grace is ours when we turn to You.
We ask this in the name of Your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
in union with the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. ([Celebrating the Word](#) was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).