

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time: August 30, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

Reflection on the Gospel *(Matthew 16: 21-27 Jeremiah 20:7-9 Romans 12:1-21)*

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you wish to come after me you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.”

The cross is the universal worldwide symbol of Christianity. Every church, chapel, and cathedral has at least one cross, usually many, inside and outside; grave-stones of Christian fallen military personnel are engraved with a cross; many national flags use the symbol of a cross; we hang crosses on the walls of our homes; and we wear them around our necks. They are presents that we give at baptisms, first communions and confirmations.

Why would a horrific torturous capital punishment tool reserved only for those who have committed the most heinous crimes be so prevalent, so revered, and so adored? Because it represents Christ’s sacrifice and our assurance of salvation. Think about that --- what an incredible gift of grace!

It is fitting that this Gospel, as well as the readings from Jeremiah and Paul’s letter to the Romans, is read on the last Sunday of our summer series on the Letter of James. As we have heard in the reflections during our summer series, James provides practical advice as to how we are to ‘take up our cross’ --- by showing pastoral care to each other, by propelling our faith into actions, by sharing our wealth to build a peaceable world, and by thoughtfully, lovingly choosing our words as we communicate with each other.

Paul reminds us that we each have been given different gifts, and we should share those gifts with each other in community, fellowship, and love. These gifts are our crosses – these gifts allow us to demonstrate our faith in Christ through our works. Christ doesn’t say it will be easy – crosses are heavy, and bulky, and burdensome. Blisters and splinters will result. Sometimes our gifts can feel the same. This lifetime journey of discipleship while transforming may also feel burdensome. There is much to do and often not

enough time or energy or willpower. We will become tired and weary and frustrated and just want to rest or retreat or give up or retire. But as Christ says to Peter: “You are not thinking as God does, but as human beings do.”

We must be willing to abandon our human needs for affirmation, success, stuff and comfort, and take up our own cross of love and talents and give ourselves away. As Jeremiah professes: “The word of the Lord was like a raging fire in my heart.... I could not hold it in.” We too cannot hold it in.

So: sing songs of praise, help the suffering, heal and care for the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, assist the unemployed and the underemployed, house the homeless, purchase wisely, care for creation, bless and pray for each other (do you hear James speaking??).

Valerie Rolandelli