

## Fr. Jins' Homily for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 3, 2023

Matthew 16:21-27

The readings for this Sunday remind us that Christians are called to live their lives in a different way from others around them. Christian discipleship demands honesty, the willingness to suffer ("take up your cross"), generosity ("to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God"), and readiness to follow Jesus by obeying his commandment of love. Today's readings explain how this Christian mission should be accomplished. They explain how we should know and live the will of God, accepting the suffering involved in doing so. These readings tell us as well that while suffering is an integral part of our earthly life, it is also our road to glory. There is no crown without a cross. Jeremiah, in the first reading, is a certainly a prototype of the suffering Christ. He tried to live the will of God bravely facing confrontations and persecution, and he continued to proclaim His message because the message itself "becomes like a fire, burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 63), the Psalmist sings, "O God, You are my God Whom I seek; for You my flesh pines and my soul thirsts, like the earth parched, lifeless and without water. ... You are my Help, and in the shadow of Your Wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to You: Your right hand upholds me." In the second reading, Paul advises the Romans and us (Rom 12:1-2): to "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice" to God by explicitly rejecting the ungodly behavior of the world around us and by discerning and doing the will of God. He learned from his experience that commitment to God's will required an attitude of non-conformity to one's contemporary culture and drew hostility and physical danger on him because of his fidelity to Jesus. In today's Gospel, Jesus takes his disciples by surprise when, after Peter's great confession of Faith, Jesus "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." After correcting Peter's protest, Jesus announces the three conditions of Christian discipleship: "deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." Unless we constantly remind ourselves of the demands of this difficult vocation from God, we will fail to be the kind of disciples that Christ expects us to be.

True disciples of Christ are: a) truly compassionate: they are willing to visit the infected and the sick in hospitals, the incontinent elderly, the handicapped, and those who suffer dementia in nursing homes, and AIDS patients in hospices; b) truly humble: they are able to see that every good gift comes from God alone, and that His gifts to us of time, personal talents, and resources should inspire gratitude, not pride; c) truly patient: they are committed to working with challenging children, adolescents with problems, young adults who are struggling with their Faith, with the intellectually challenged, and with those suffering dementia; d) truly forgiving: they are willing to forgive, not just once or twice but again and again, because they know that God has forgiven them again and again; e) truly loving: they willingly visit people in prisons, in retirement homes, and in homeless shelters; f) truly faithful: they are living out a committed, trusting relationship with God, with spouse, with family and friends.

A true disciple examines his or her conscience every day asking three questions about discipleship: a) Did I sacrifice a part of my time, talents, and income for my parish and the missionary activities of the Church? b) Did I practice self-control over my thoughts, words, deeds, and use of mass media, and put loving restriction on the cell phone and Internet activities of my children? c) Did I train my children in my Faith in a loving, providing, redeeming God by encouraging them as we spend some time together as a family praying and reading the Bible and by teaching them through example and word to pardon each other, to ask for God's pardon for our own sins and failures, to thank God for His blessings and to participate in the Sunday school classes and youth programs?

We need to ask additional questions. Does my Church offer a Faith strong enough to command a sacrifice on my part? Do I have enough Faith to offer up a genuine sacrifice for Christ's sake? Can a Church in today's self-centered culture ask its people to sacrifice something for the sake of the Gospel? Jesus' challenge to all would-be disciples requires more than a "feel-good" spirituality. A true disciple asks, "Am I willing to sacrifice something for the Kingdom?" What made it possible for first-century Christians to choose a martyr's death? What has kept generations of Christians from losing Faith and falling apart when confronted by the violence and hatred of this world? How can I offer even the day-to-day sacrifices of my Faith that demand things I don't want to do or give? Can I sacrifice some of my time in order to visit a homeless shelter or soup kitchen? Can I sacrifice my job security and refuse to "go along" with a policy that is unjust? Can I sacrifice my need to be in control and let Christ do with me whatever he may will?

May God bless our every works and efforts, our every good endeavours, at all times, and may He continue to inspire us all, to follow Him so that we may always do what we can to seek Him, and not for the glory of the world.