

Scripture Reading - A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew (*Matthew 16:24-26*) *Jesus says, "Come, follow me."*

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – there are not two paths but ONE

Jesus - the Way to go, the Path to walk. Jesus is not a Messiah of military power. In fact, He did not free Israel from Roman rule and He never assured it of political glory. As a true Servant of God, He carried out His mission in solidarity, in service, and in the humiliation of death. He is the Messiah who did not fit into any mould and who came without fanfare, and who cannot be "understood" with the logic of success and power, the kind of logic often used by the world to verify its projects and actions. Having come to carry out the will of the Father, Jesus remained faithful to it right to the end. He thus carried out His mission of salvation for all those who believe in Him and love Him, not in word, but in deed. **Love is the condition for following Him, but it is sacrifice that is the proof of that love.**

If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Lk 9:23, Mt 16:24). These words denote the radicality of a choice that does not allow for hesitation or second thoughts. It is a demanding requirement that unsettled even the disciples and that, throughout the ages, has held back many men and women from following Christ. But precisely this radicality has also produced admirable examples of sanctity and martyrdom that strengthened and confirmed the way of the Church. Even today these words are regarded as a stumbling block and folly (cf. 1 Cor 1: 22-25). Yet they must be faced, because the path outlined by God for his Son is the path to be undertaken by the disciple who has decided to follow Jesus. **There are not two paths, but only one: the one trodden by the Master.** The disciple cannot invent a different way. Jesus walks ahead of His followers and asks each one to do as He Himself has done.

"He must deny himself." To deny oneself is to give up one's own plans that are often small and petty in order to accept God's plan. The human being has a deep-rooted tendency to "think only of self", to regard one's own person as the centre of interest and to see oneself as the standard against which to gauge everything. One who chooses to follow Christ, on the other hand, avoids being wrapped up in oneself and does not evaluate things according to self interest. He/she looks on life in terms of gift and gratuitousness, not in terms of conquest and possession. **Life in its fullness is only lived in self-giving, and that is the fruit of the grace of Christ: an existence that is free and in communion with God and neighbour.**

"Take up his cross daily and follow me." In the teaching of Jesus, it is not suffering for its own sake that a Christian seeks, but love. When the cross is embraced it becomes a sign of love and of total self-giving. To carry it behind Christ means to be united with Him in offering the greatest proof of love. We cannot speak about the cross without considering God's love for us, the fact that God wishes to shower us with good things. With His invitation "follow me," Jesus not only says again to His disciples: take Me as your model, but also: **share My life and My choices, and stake your life for love of God and for neighbour together with Me.** This is how Jesus opens up before us the "way of life". Christ is our Way, our Truth and Life. (cf John 14:6). (*Reflection from extracts from Pope John Paul II's homily to young people on Aug 28, 2005*).

Conversation with Our Lord

Precious Lord, You have taught me that there is no other way to the Promised Land than by the royal way of the Cross of Salvation. Through Your Cross You have demonstrated to me Your undying love even when I am a sinner and totally unworthy of Your love and Sacrifice. Lord, I take up Your invitation to follow You. For love of You, I whole-heartedly embrace all the crosses You send my way, whatever shape they may take, knowing that I am never alone but You are always by my side. Like You, I patiently accept all sufferings, rejection, humiliation, misunderstandings, failures, disappointments, sicknesses, whatever afflictions that life has to offer, and I offer them to You Lord as a gift of the proof of my love. May Your Precious Blood give me the grace and strength to triumph in all my trials. Lord, You are my Way to eternal joy. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.

Life in its fullness is only lived in self-giving.. (Pope John Paul II)