

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

The Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

We've heard these words hundreds of times: "Take up your cross and follow Jesus." From today's Gospel reading it appears that Jesus' disciples were not exactly happy to hear these words. Like their contemporaries, they were hoping that God's coming as Messiah would usher in the good times, the easy times. Their concern is universal. We have an image of life that is pleasant and comfortable. It's natural for us to seek ease over effort.

But there's a hidden meaning in what could be taken as a literal statement: that we could all follow Jesus with a cross on our back. The deeper meaning is suggested by what follows, after he tells Peter that his followers would have to suffer and die if they were to be his disciples. Some see it as the great paradox of Christianity. It goes like this: If we want to receive life, we have to first lose it. Sounds a bit like nonsense, doesn't it?

A Gospel Word for the Home

Matthew 16:21-27

First, let's recall that Jesus shows us the way to the truth. He taught us that during his Last Supper. So he is the model for showing us how to live the fullest, most exciting, richest and most rewarding life imaginable. And from today's Gospel reading, we're informed that this will not be easy. Our focus should be more on giving than receiving, more away from our own self-centered desires, and more toward serving the needs of others. It's a bit like what President John Kennedy said many years ago: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." It's basically a call for reaching out in service to something greater than just ourselves. This is altruism.

Some call this self-giving, which is certainly something that parents do every day. What's important here is that being a responsible parent is at the heart of the Gospel. It's one very important way we carry our cross, which, we recall, does not necessarily mean that this burden is overly heavy. That's where the paradox comes into play. In giving we receive, in losing we gain, in dying we rise to new life. On the level of pure logic or reason, this is over the edge. To some, it really will sound like nonsense. But to those who know and love the Lord, it's the reason why they get out of bed each day: to love and serve the Lord.

Parent Survival

If what we do each day is thought of as very worthwhile, even the hardest tasks become a bit easier. So connecting our faith with daily life is very helpful in avoiding parent burnout. The research on the topic points out that it's not hard work that pulls us down. It's work that can at times seem meaningless and without much value. Carrying the cross doesn't have to mean that we place a heavy wooden cross on our backs and carry it up a hill like Jesus did. Rather, it can simply mean that we exert more effort to provide for, and help our children reach their God-given potential.

And it doesn't mean that we have to be hard on ourselves. Rather we simply have to be good for others by providing a listening ear, a helping hand, or a supportive word. Simple gestures of kindness and consideration fully qualify as crosses carried in the name of Jesus. Sometimes we need to translate the language of formal religion into the language of the home. That's what we try to do here each week. We hope you find it helpful and make your exalted life as a parent more joyful and rich in meaning.

by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Car or Meal Talk

Okay, Jesus says we are to follow him and carry our cross. So let's talk about what each of us sees are the crosses we carry. And it's not allowed to say that your brother or sister is your cross. Think of something else.

One-Line Prayer

Jesus, Our Way,
Send us your Spirit and give us the strength to follow you, both when it's easy, and when it is difficult.
Amen.