

Ordinary Time 22A 2017

Follow Me!

Progress and Failure: Life is never a straight path. We make progress and fall back. We fall back, and we move forward. For example, last week Peter made his magnificent confession of faith, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” and Jesus make him the rock of the church. This week, Peter tries to turn Jesus from his destiny to suffer and die, and Jesus calls Peter a “Satan,” a tempter, someone who is trying to prevent him from doing God’s will. Two steps forward, one step backward. So it happened with Peter, so it happens with us.

Peter’s Problem: Peter had a problem. He could not understand—he did not want to understand—why Jesus must suffer and die. After all, Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. He was the one who was bringing the kingdom of God, and when the kingdom came, Peter and the other disciples would gloriously reign with Jesus. So what is all this distasteful talk about rejection, suffering, and death? What does resurrection mean?

Our Problem: Peter’s problem is our problem. It has always been our problem. We too confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We look forward to the kingdom that will come in glory and power. We too want to reign and rule with Christ. But what we resist is the cross. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could have the glory without shame, power without weakness, the resurrection without the cross? We view the cross from the point of the world rather than from the point of view of God.

Jesus’ Response: Jesus taught Peter and today he teaches us that if we are to be his disciple (1) we must deny ourselves, (2) take up our cross, and (3) follow him.

Deny Ourselves: To deny ourselves means to die to those desires and ambitions that make us center stage in the drama of life. This, of course, is the most difficult task of the

Christian life because we are afraid that if we die to ourselves we will lose our life. But it is only when we die to ourselves and make Christ the center of our lives that we truly find our life. And so the first step in the Christian life, the step without which we cannot move forward, is to die to our selfish desires so that Christ will be the center, the only center of our life.

Take Up Our Cross: The second step in the Christian life is to take up our cross. Taking up the cross will mean something different for each one of us. For some of us the cross is the burdens we must bear every day for the sake of our family. For others, it is be a special challenge that has been laid upon our shoulders. No matter who we are, there is something we must accept in life for the sake of Christ so that we can die to self and make Christ the center of our life.

Losing Our Soul: At the end of today's Gospel Jesus asks us, what is the profit in gaining the whole world but losing our soul in the process? Our soul is the deepest part of us; it is what makes us whole and who we are? If we surrender our soul, we lose our very self? If we accept something in exchange for our soul, we are no longer Jesus' disciples. And yet, we know there are people who surrender their soul for things that are fleeting a passing. We meet them every day. People spend their whole life amassing power, wealth, prestige, possessions, and at the end of their life, when they have gotten everything they want, they are not content. Why? Because they have surrendered the deepest part of themselves for the sake of vain glory; they have lost the deepest part of themselves—their soul?

The Only Way Forward: There is only one way to follow Jesus, and it is the way that we and Peter are always resisting. It is the way of the cross, the way of surrendering our lives completely and entirely to Christ!