

August 30, 2020 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

“Take Up Your Cross”

Take up your cross and follow me. What a statement for Jesus to make. Did the disciples or anyone else understand what Jesus meant by ‘take up your cross’? I wonder now how many actually understand today what that means. Am I to take all my burdens, (is that what it means to take up my cross?) and follow Jesus.

At times I believe I know its meaning and call for me. I am able to move forward with some confidence. At other times, like now, I get more confused. I’m afraid that I come to this today with more questions than answers.

So, let us start at the beginning. First Jesus says in Verse 24 “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” What does Jesus mean by ‘deny themselves’?

Professor Burke writes: ‘to deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. To deny oneself means finally, once and for all to dethrone self and enthrone God. To deny oneself means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life and to make God the ruling principle – more, the ruling passion of life. The life of constant self-denial is the life of constant assent to God.’

To follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves, we must only worship God. Not the job, not the house we live in, not any possessions we own, and mostly not the love for money. We live humbly loving God and neighbor. We must live a life full of passion for others. To love and help carry their load when they cannot.

At one time or another you have heard someone talking about the circumstances of their life and they will say “This is cross to bear.” It may be an injury or physical ailment, a wayward child, loss of a love one, even a failing relationship. There are times I have wanted to push back when listening, but all that was really needed was an ear for some deep listening. The cross that Jesus invites us to pick up and take after Him with is one that is received and responded to with some intention. It is not by accident that this happens and with the cross of Jesus, it is not carried for ourselves but for others.

If we don't allow ourselves to go deep into the real pain with seems to fall to us all, what good are we then to anyone else. My burdens, what I am carrying may just help another with their burdens. It may be that in our own suffering we find our own mortality. We need to face our own suffering so that we can feel what another is feeling with theirs'. Maybe then, when someone says, ‘this is my cross to bear’ it is the first step in experiencing healing so that they may be able to help another.

We need to keep in mind that one's cross is very personal and individual. But for Jesus, another was engaged to carry his cross. Are we also at times called to do the same?

It was the act of dying that Jesus had to do alone, just as for us. But he was alone there on the hill. There were witnesses that would not leave the foot of the cross. They stood there with their eyes and hearts uplifted praying the whole while. It was the same ones that carried his body to the tomb and returned a few days later to tend to the body. Alone, yes but witnessed by others.

Isn't time that we pick up our crosses and follow Jesus? We are called to bear witness to the suffering of others. With every 'picking up' and every 'following after' for someone else we go deeper into our own. It's never only for the sake of another, but it takes us back into our own struggles before returning again for the sake of others.

This is not just a one-time thing. It is an everyday kind of thing. Sometime that we must do over and over. We are on this journey; we are answering Jesus' call.

There have been a few times in my life so far that I have had family tragedy. The first was when my daughter-in-law Beth was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was hard to watch her decay from the disease. At every point she had faith that she would be healed. I helped take care of her and the house so my son could work. The chemo would

only make her pain worse; she would have allergic reaction and end up back in the hospital. We found out that her breast cancer was a metastasizing cancer that spread to her lung.

Beth and I would lay on her bed at night watching a movie or cross stitching (mostly me do the stitching) and she sometimes would cry, she was afraid of dying and leaving my son alone. She was worried how her parents would be. She would say that she would be alright because she was in God's hands.

I would sit and listen to my son talk, how much he loved her and how hard this has been on her. Her parents would come over, we would all sit around, and I would listen to stories they would tell about Beth. Beth would grin and say 'Mama, its not true, they just making it up.' Yes, she called me Mama. It was good to share in her story; we had time...so we thought. She lived for three long agonizing years.

The day she went home to God, I was at church She passed on a Sunday morning while I was at church. I think she did that for me, so I would be comforted by God. And for me, I prayed that God would take her into his hands and release her from her pain.

