

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 13, 2009 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 50:4c-9a

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear;
and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.
I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield from buffets and
spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.
He is near who upholds my right;
if anyone wishes to oppose me,
let us appear together.
Who disputes my right?
Let that man confront me.
See, the Lord GOD is my help;
who will prove me wrong?

Psalm: Ps 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. (9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of
the living.

I love the LORD because he has heard
my voice in supplication,
because he has inclined his ear to me
the day I called.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the
living.

The cords of death encompassed me;
the snares of the netherworld seized upon me;
I fell into distress and sorrow,
and I called upon the name of the LORD,
"O LORD, save my life!"

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the
living.

Gracious is the LORD and just;
yes, our God is merciful.
The LORD keeps the little ones;
I was brought low, and he saved me.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the
living.

For he has freed my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
I shall walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the
living.

Scripture Reading: James 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if
someone says he has faith but does not have
works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or
sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the
day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace,
keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give
them the necessities of the body, what good is it?
So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is
dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith
and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me
without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to
you from my works.

Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of
Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his
disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They
said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still
others one of the prophets." And he asked them,
"But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him
in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned
them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must
suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the
chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and
rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then
Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At
this he turned around and, looking at his disciples,
rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan.
You are thinking not as God does, but as human
beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and
said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me
must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow
me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose
it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that
of the gospel will save it."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

“But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). Peter is quick with an answer to this question. In doing so, he names Jesus as the One, the Messiah, whose coming has been so anticipated. Jesus doesn’t commend Peter for his statement of faith. Instead he talks of suffering, which Peter rejects, perhaps in an attempt to make Jesus “feel better.” Jesus rebukes him quickly and harshly by saying, “Get behind me, Satan” (Mark 8:33). He will not water down or sugarcoat the price of discipleship. It means suffering and there is no other way around it.

This is a puzzling, disturbing passage, especially the rebuke to Peter. Is Peter indeed being a satan (that is, adversary), a tempter, trying to cajole Jesus into seeing things differently? The entire exchange begs another question – “Who do we *want* Jesus to be?” – A miracle worker? Mr. Fix-It? Santa Claus? Do we want him to be a revolutionary, a prophet, a political leader, a superhero? There are all sorts of ways to make Jesus into the kind of Savior we want him to be. We can skip over the parts of the gospel that make us uncomfortable. We can put a “spin” on the Christian message that makes it more suitable for our modern-day lifestyle. We can be tempted to move away from the challenges of discipleship and into a religiosity that is full of “feel-good” messages of comfort and complacency.

This passage in Mark’s Gospel marks an important turning point. Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, to the cross and suffering. Ultimately it will lead to his death and his Resurrection. If we are to follow him, are we willing to take on the cross of which he speaks? If so, it will inevitably lead us to consider the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Our answer, as disciples, must come out of faith rather than wishful thinking.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. What do people in today’s culture seem to want Jesus to be? What indications do I see of this in my home, parish, neighborhood, school or workplace?
2. What do I make of Jesus’ rebuke to Peter? Does it disturb me? Why?
3. What cross do I bear as I try to follow Jesus? How has it shifted in weight or dimension throughout my faith journey?
4. Read over the last line of the gospel one more time. What does it say to me at this point in my life? What questions does it raise for me?
5. Answer Jesus’ question, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). How does my response influence my life? How will my response touch others?

INVITATION TO ACT

1. Name someone in your life who is bearing a cross that is painful for you to witness. Extend your support and encouragement to this person.
2. Identify one aspect of your life – an attitude, a behavior, a distraction – that you need to lose in order to be more open to the life God has to share with you. Write it on a card and carry it in your pocket to remind you of your intention to lose it or let it go.
3. Instead of asking God to ease your burdens, pray to him in thanksgiving that he gives you renewed strength to face the challenges that are set in your path.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Leader Lord God, our crosses are heavy, more than we seem able to bear at times. We believe that you have not turned away from us in our struggle to be faithful. Hear us and be our help as we place our needs before you.

Response “The Lord God is my help; who will prove me wrong?” (Isaiah 50:9)

Leader It is tempting at times, like Peter, to deny the suffering that is part of our growth in faith. Give us the courage to accept our crosses with hope and grace.....Response

Leader Sometimes it is harder to watch others struggle under the weight of their crosses than to bear our own. Show us how to be supportive, caring and compassionate with those who are in pain.....Response

Leader The invitation to save our lives through losing them is both mysterious and disturbing. Strengthen us as we let go of aspects of living that ultimately rob us of true life in you.....Response

Leader We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.....Response

All Amen