

## HOMILY SUNDAY 22 - A

### “Take Up Your Cross”

(Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27)

\*\*\*\*\*

What is one of the most common religious symbols in the world? A pretty safe answer would have to be the cross. As a symbol, the cross is popular, found everywhere. As a reality, however, it is hard to understand and accept, and most of us try to avoid it at all cost.

A young man was at the end of his rope. Seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer. “Lord, I can’t go on,” he said. “I have too heavy a cross to bear.” The Lord replied, “My son, if you can’t bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then, open that other door and pick out any cross you wish.” The man was filled with relief and said, “Thank you, Lord.” He did as he was told. Upon opening the other door, he saw many crosses - some so large that the tops were not visible. He tried on a variety of crosses but none seemed right – there was something wrong with every one he tried. Then he tried on a small cross leaning against a far wall. “I’d like this one, Lord,” he whispered. The Lord replied, “My son, that is the cross you just brought in.”

Have faith, take up your cross and follow Jesus.

There are three predictions of the Cross in the gospels and three reactions. The second prediction occurs after the transfiguration, where the disciples are filled with sadness. The third prediction of the passion occurs before Jesus and his band of disciples enter Jerusalem the last time. In that passage, the disciples are arguing over who will have the most power.

The first prediction of the Passion is in today’s gospel. After professing Jesus as the Messiah, Peter reacts and becomes a stumbling stone instead of a rock. Jesus’ response is to invite Peter into deeper and renewed discipleship – “get behind me” is not a location but the posture of a disciple.

The temptation to accomplish his ministry in the way human criteria judge to be successful is, in fact, a demonic temptation. Jesus’ mission is to inaugurate an alternative kingdom, a radically different way of exercising authority. Peter continues to think as good human beings think, reasonably, egocentric and in terms of human friendship and success.

The death of Jesus was part of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus was a knowing and willing partner in God’s strategy, not a hapless victim. The Christian life is counter-cultural. It is not just denial or asceticism, but rather an orientation to one’s life that is not focused on self at all, either as self-esteem, or self-abasement, self-fulfillment nor self-emptying.

Christian life is based on faith in Christ and confidence in future victory, not just ideals or noble principles. It is based on faith that something has happened that makes everything different. To believe in Jesus as the Christ and to live accordingly means to reorient one’s

live toward the good news that God has acted decisively and ultimately in Jesus. It is based on the past and future revelation of God.

Christian life is to confess Jesus as the Christ, as God's definitive act of revelation and salvation. The word utilized to mean "confession" also means "martyrdom" in the sense of witness. The giving of one's life is presented as an act of testimony to a truth bigger than oneself. It may mean martyrdom or the daily giving of one's self away in commitment to Christ. Orientation towards God, revealed in Christ as the Lord of one's life, rather than idolatrous self-orientation, is the decisive, crucial difference.

What is a cross? Any inconvenience or obstacle that I would rather not have to deal with, that challenges me, that if accepted in faith leads to joy and new life. Our crosses are many and varied.

The decision to try to learn to speak Cree to make my ministry among the First Nations more effective was a cross for me. It would have been much easier not to have tried. Georgina Bouvier in Ile-a-la-Crosse had a paraplegic son that she kept at home and cared for day in and day out. The child had a special bond with her and responded only to her. She took delight in each small response. What would have been an onerous burden for others became a source of great compassion and love for her. After the death of her child, she volunteered to visit the sick in the hospital such was the depth of her compassion.

Dealing with one's addictions rather than medicating the pain at the root of that addiction may be a cross for some. Admitting one's own defect of character and choosing to deal with it and heal it may be a cross for others. Accepting another person in a relationship as that person is, rather than trying to change him or her, can be a cross for many.

A question we can ask ourselves is, "What is my cross? How am I carrying it?"

Here are a few suggestions to help us carry our crosses in life:

1. Share them with others as Jesus did on the way to Gethsemane.
2. Pray about them. Jesus did this, especially in the garden of Gethsemane.
3. Share how we feel about them with others as Jesus did in that same garden.

Ignatius of Antioch once wrote "My spirit is given over to the humble service of the cross which is a stumbling block to unbelievers but to us salvation and eternal life." He truly understood the mystery of the cross in his life.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today makes present the love of Jesus on the cross for us. Filled with that love, we are sent out to live his way of the Cross in our own lives through humble service.

So have faith, take up your cross and follow Jesus.