

HOMILY SUNDAY 20-C  
“Racing Towards the Cross”

(Jeremiah 38:1-2, 4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53)

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Have you ever participated in a Walk-a-Thon?

The Cross of Jesus is the way to new life.

At a fundraising race in Beauval once, I was the oldest walker. The serious runners went first, eyes fixed firmly on the finish line. Local joggers were next, more interested in the exercise than speed. Grade school kids in long tee shirts followed them, trying to get half way. Finally, seniors, parents pushing buggies, dog owners with their pets ... all, whatever their position, kept looking and moving ahead towards the goal, the finish line.

To be a Christian and not keep your eyes fixed on Jesus is a contradiction. To accept the gospel message and ignore the example of Jesus makes no sense. Jesus is the sacrament of God’s presence and love - then we must follow him.

In today’s gospel, Jesus speaks of a baptism he yearns to accomplish. That baptism can be his death on the cross. His physical baptism with water in the Jordan was a symbol of the cross; it was a commitment to accept death on the cross as the greatest proof of God’s love, and the way to redeem the world.

We are prepared for the gospel by the story of Jeremiah, the great Old Testament prophet who dared to live and speak the truth to the kings of his day who wanted to go to war, and was punished for it by being put into a well for three days - an image that prefigures Jesus.

Where Jesus leads, we as Christians must follow. He sets the pace; we try to keep up. Our own baptism and faith commits us to accept, pick up, carry and live the cross in our own lives. We must fix our eyes on the cross as the goal of our own lives, as the way to glory.

Jesus warned that those who make a commitment to him will be persecuted, that a commitment of faith also means that our attitude toward material possessions must change, and that moral responsibilities must be taken with even greater seriousness. We cannot make a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord without its affecting the way we relate to friends and to family members. Because our commitment to Christ shapes our values, priorities, goals and behaviour, it also forces us to change old patterns of life, and these changes may precipitate crises in significant relationships.

Hurs von Balthasar offers some interesting thoughts on today’s gospel. For him, the fire that Jesus has come to cast upon the earth can also be seen as the fire of divine love that will ignite men and women. It will begin to burn from the Cross, which is the baptism he fears. But by no means will all humans permit themselves to be set ablaze by the un-conditionality of this fire, this love. Because some will resist the very love that could and would lead human beings to unity, humanity will be divided. More clearly and inexorably than before Christ, humanity will divide itself into two

kingdoms or states. St. Augustine called them the “city of God”, where love rules, and the “city of this world”, where cupidity rules.

Grace is needed every day because the “kingdom of this world” is filled with cruelty. Injustice has always ruled the world, and that contrast has only sharpened since the coming of Jesus. What happens to Jeremiah is a single parable for the countless abominations that take place in the world, at times in the name of religion. The psalm speaks of the mud of this world in which people sink. Jeremiah has been placed in that mud, as was St. Paul who saw himself as in the last and lowest place of all.

In the face of this mud, contest and strife against evil, in which the Christian is always tempted to give up, there is only one thing to do – that is to look steadily at the “One who inspired and perfects faith”, the One who “has endured the opposition of sinners”, to himself. Jesus made his way through this mud, right to the throne of God. He is our model and our way. Instead of giving up, we must give in, surrender to him, place all our trust in him, and do what he would do.

Hurt comes to us sometimes even from people we think are our friends. One lady shared with me how she greeted her aunt with “Hi slim, you’re looking good.” Her aunt turned around and replied tartly, “And how are you beefy?” She was shocked, and then devastated, because she did have a weight problem. She could only go by herself for a while, and cry her eyes out. It is at times like these that we need to keep our eyes on Jesus who can show us how to handle times like these in our lives.

The Eucharist we celebrate is like a weekly or daily renewal of our baptism - we are incorporated into Jesus’ own body and blood. We are re-committing ourselves to live like him, to do what he did, our leader and Lord.

So remember, the Cross of Jesus is the way to new life.