

Twenty-Fourth Sunday of the Year

(Cycle B)

READING I: Isaiah 50:5-9

DATE: 09/12-13/2009

READING II: James 2:14-18*

PLACE: Corpus Christi

GOSPEL: Mark 8:27-35*

TIME: 4:00 p.m.; 10:30 a.m.

EVENT: Pastoral Council Installation

THEME: Christian suffering in taking up the cross is a chosen suffering, in that we can choose to avoid it by choosing to avoid what is right.

I. Transitions

- With the Labor Day Weekend behind us, we are in a time of transition.
- Students are returning to school, our parish is gearing up for another year of ministry, and even Washington is back at work, now that Congress is back in session.
- With today's gospel reading, we also see a transition in the Gospel according to Mark.
- We are about midpoint in the gospel, and Jesus asks his disciples who people say that he is.
- Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets, but Peter says that Jesus is the Christ.
- And when Peter says this, Jesus warns them not to tell anyone about him.

II. Miracle Worker to Suffering Messiah

- Up until this point in the Gospel, we have mostly been reading about Jesus' travels through Galilee and his ministry of miracles.
- In fact, last week, Deacon Fritz preached about the magical, mystical element of Jesus' ministry as retold by Mark's gospel.
- And, witnessing Jesus as a miracle worker, it is understandable how Peter could readily conclude that Jesus is the Christ – *christ* simply meaning “the anointed one,” or, in this context, God's chosen one.
- But no sooner does Peter proclaim Jesus the Christ than Jesus begins to instruct his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer greatly, be rejected by the religious leaders and be killed, and rise again after three days.
- When Peter objects to this, Jesus insists that it must be this way.
- Indeed, he tells them, those who want to be his disciples must be willing to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.

- From this point on in the gospel, Mark will shift his emphasis of Jesus as miracle worker to Jesus as the Suffering Messiah.
- It will take the rest of the gospel for folks to understand that Jesus is not simply the magical miracle worker they have come to know.
- That's why he's always telling them to keep his identity secret – because they won't fully understand who he is until the entire story is told.

III. Suffering By Choice

- Suffering is something that most of us have encountered.
- We associate it with an illness or some type of disaster or tragedy that occurs to us.
- We suffer at the hands of other people or because we lose a loved one through death or a failed relationship.
- And when these kinds of things happen, Christians often associate them as the cross they must bear in life.
- But, for as significant as these sufferings can be, they are *not* really the suffering that Jesus is talking about when he admonishes us to take up our cross and follow him.
- The kind of suffering that Jesus is talking about is a *chosen* suffering.
- Not so much a suffering that we identify and then choose to undergo – like some sort of deliberate self-mortification.
- No, the kind of suffering Jesus refers to is chosen only in that we can choose to *avoid* it if we want to.
- Jesus specifically talks about a suffering that comes to us from our decision to be his followers, to do the right thing.
- Unlike the suffering that comes to us from illness or tragedy or death, over which we have no control, we can avoid the suffering that Jesus is talking about.
- We can simply not do – or stop doing – the right thing, and we can avoid the suffering that comes with it.
- Jesus calls us to this kind of suffering because it reflects the very suffering that he would undergo.
- A suffering that came about because he chose to do the right thing before God.
- A suffering that he could have avoided at any time by abandoning his mission.

IV. Choosing the Right

- So, when Christians talk about bearing our crosses, it's that *chosen* suffering that we're talking about.
 - Jesus isn't telling us to choose suffering for the sake of suffering.
 - He is simply saying that Christians cannot expect to do the right thing and not have to suffer for it.
- Young people cannot expect to say no to alcohol or drugs and not be turned away by certain groups of other young people.
 - Students and workers cannot expect to be honest in their dealings with others and not have to work harder than those who might choose to cheat or take shortcuts.
 - In the political realm, those who wish to work for justice for poor people, or immigrants, or people lacking access to health care have to expect to pay a price for it
 - whether it be the vilification of political opponents, or simply the higher costs in taxes or services in order to provide for these things.
- This is at the heart of James' epistle today, when he talks about faith and works.
 - What good is it to care about feeding the hungry or clothing the naked if you're not willing to pay the price that comes with it?
 - And if Christians say they want these things, but are not prepared to pay the price for them, then their faith is indeed dead.

V. Conclusion

- So, it's kind of fitting that, as we reach this post-Labor Day transition, we also reach a transition in the Gospel of Mark.
 - We must indeed recognize Jesus as the magical, mystical miracle worker that he is.
 - But we also must recognize him as the suffering Messiah that he will become.
- And so, as we return to school, or to work, or to parish life, this is the Christ that we hold before us.
 - A Christ who is both a miracle worker and a suffering Messiah.
 - A Christ who calls us to do the right thing, to take up our cross, and to follow him.