



Reflection

Twenty-Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time

September 15, 2024

24th Sunday Mark 8.34-35 Take up the cross and follow me

Can you be a Christian but not a disciple? The gospel for this Sunday exhorts us to follow Jesus, take up our cross, and deny our own will in order to embrace God's will, no matter how painful. The Christian life is about following Jesus and doing what he says, such as "love your enemy" (Mt 5:44), "pray for those who hurt you" (Mt 5:44), and "forgive those who offend you" (Mt 6:14-15).

Cross-bearing encompasses much more than patience and obedience. To take up your cross is to purposefully choose a path of rejection, suffering, loneliness, betrayal, denial, hostility, insults, persecution, mental pain, and even death for the sake of Christ and the Gospel! Taking up the cross would have been extremely shameful during Jesus' lifetime because it represented the loss of both physical and spiritual life. However, this was the only way to follow Jesus from holiness to glory. And so the cross will always be a symbol of the circumstances and events in our lives that humble us, expose us, offend our pride, shame us, and reveal our basic evil -- the evil that Jesus described earlier: "Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness" (Mark 7:22). This cross can also take various forms, like as persecution and martyrdom, affliction, and sadness of any type. Furthermore, crosses represent a rejection of the world's harmful ideals and idolatry.

On the other side, denying oneself implies that we reject our natural feelings about oneself, i.e. our right to live our own life. We do not have the last say over what we will do or where we will go. If you choose to follow Jesus, you no longer own yourself. He has ultimate authority over your life. However, self-denial does not imply self-annihilation, but rather a thorough reconstruction of our beliefs and perspectives. Thus, let us deny ourselves, that is, reject our self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and the belief that we can handle life on our own.