

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Carrying the Cross with Faith and Love

One morning, a husband had a bitter quarrel with his wife. To cool off, he went to Mass. When he came home, he saw his wife cooking in the kitchen. He quietly walked up behind her and suddenly lifted her into the air.

Hey! What are you doing? You just came back from church—did the priest tell you to be romantic?”

“No,” he replied. “He told us to carry our cross!”

It could have been the other way around—but the husband was heavier!

Jokes aside, today’s readings speak about something very real: suffering and the cost of following Jesus.

When Jesus tells His disciples that He must suffer and be put to death, Peter cannot accept it. He says, “Heaven forbid, Lord! This must never happen to You!” Peter wants an easier way for Jesus.

But Jesus reminds him, “You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

We can understand Peter. None of us likes suffering. We naturally look for comfort, security, and an easier path. So when Jesus says, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me,” we may wonder: Is Jesus asking us to suffer?

No. Jesus is not glorifying suffering. He carried the Cross not because He wanted to suffer, but because He loved us and wanted to save us.

Each of us has a cross in life. Sometimes it is illness, aging, loneliness, disappointment, family problems, or the loss of someone we love. Sometimes our suffering is caused by the choices of others. And sometimes, honestly, it comes from our own poor choices.

Jesus does not ask us to look for suffering. He asks us to face the crosses that come our way with faith and to use our lives not only for ourselves but also for others.

When we care for a sick family member, visit someone who is lonely, forgive someone who has hurt us, or sacrifice our time for another person, there may be inconvenience and difficulty. But when that sacrifice comes from love, it becomes an offering to God.

The important question is not, “Will I have a cross?” We all will.

The deeper question is, “How will I carry my cross?”

Jeremiah gives us a beautiful example. He was tired, discouraged, and rejected because he faithfully preached God’s word. He reached a point where he wanted to quit. Yet he says that God’s word became “like a fire burning in my heart.” He could not keep it inside.

I find that very meaningful as a priest. Sometimes ministry can be difficult. There can be disappointments, misunderstandings, criticism, and moments when we wonder whether our efforts are making a difference.

But Jeremiah reminds us that we do not continue only because we are strong. We continue because God’s grace gives us strength.

And this is true for all of us.

Many of you have carried difficult crosses quietly. You have cared for a sick spouse or family member. You have experienced loneliness. You have forgiven someone who hurt you. You have continued doing what was right even when nobody noticed or thanked you.

These may seem like ordinary things, but when they are done with love, they become offerings to God.

St. Paul tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

The world often says, “Choose what is easiest. Protect yourself. Avoid sacrifice.”

Jesus says, “Give yourself in love.”

Sometimes carrying our cross means very simple things: being patient when we are irritated, forgiving instead of holding a grudge, visiting someone who is lonely, caring for a family member, or helping someone without expecting thanks.

These small acts of love prepare our hearts for the bigger crosses that may come.

Jesus asks us, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

We can gain money, success, possessions, comfort, and recognition. But none of these can give us eternal life.

Only Christ can.

So today, whatever cross you are carrying, don’t carry it alone. Bring it to Jesus.

When you are tired, tell Him.

When you are discouraged, tell Him.

When you are hurting, tell Him.

And remember: Jesus does not simply ask us to carry the Cross. He carries it with us.

Every time we come to Mass, we bring our joys, our struggles, our worries, and our crosses to the altar. And at this altar, we encounter the One who carried the Cross for us.

So let us ask the Lord for the grace to carry our crosses not with bitterness, but with faith; not with fear, but with courage; and not alone, but with Jesus.

Because the Cross is not the end.

Beyond the Cross is the Resurrection.

And no sacrifice made with love for God and for others is ever wasted.

Amen.