

Synopsis: OT XII (June 19) Sunday Homily on Luke 9: 18-24 (L-16)

Introduction: Today's Gospel explains the basis of our Faith as the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, our Lord and Savior. It also tells us that Christ Jesus became our Savior by his suffering, death and Resurrection. Finally, it outlines the three requirements of Christian discipleship, namely, denying oneself, taking up one's cross and following Jesus.

Scripture lessons: Jesus saw aspects of his own life and mission foreshadowed in Zechariah's prophecy given in the first reading and in Isaiah's Servant Songs. Zechariah's *pierced one* in the first reading, in the light of today's Gospel, invites us to identify ourselves with our suffering Savior, Jesus during the moments of our pains and suffering. In the second reading, Paul teaches us that through faith in Jesus we become the children of God. Hence, we have to live in accordance with Jesus' teachings, tearing down barriers of gender, race and class. Paul advises us to "put on Christ," which means that we should allow Christ to begin to work in us as our Messiah, our personal Lord and Savior, healing us of our hatred, prejudice, selfishness and whatever else blocks "God's reign" within and among us. Today's Gospel consists of two sections: 1) the Messianic confession of Peter, acknowledging Jesus as "*Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God,*" and 2) Jesus' prediction of his Passion, death and Resurrection, followed by his clear teaching on the three requirements of Christian discipleship: "*Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.*"

Life Messages: 1) Jesus must enter in to our living experience, loving us, forgiving us, helping us and transforming our lives and outlook. The knowledge of Jesus as Lord and personal Savior should become a living, personal experience for each Christian. This takes place when we listen to him through the daily, meditative reading of the Bible, talk to him through daily, personal and family prayers, offer him our lives on the altar in the Holy Mass, are reconciled with him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and recognize and respond to Him in our brothers and sisters. In the Eucharistic celebration today, we are celebrating and experiencing in our lives the death and Resurrection of Jesus -- the Christ, the Messiah, our Lord and our personal Savior.

2) We need to surrender our life to Jesus whom we experience as our Lord and Savior: Next, we surrender our lives to Jesus by rendering humble and loving

service to others, with the strong conviction that Jesus is present in every person. Finally, we begin to praise and thank God in all the events of our lives, both good and bad, realizing that God's loving hand is behind every event of our lives.

3) We need to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Jesus. Self-denial requires that we evict selfish thoughts and evil desires and tendencies from our hearts, enthrone God in our hearts and share Him with others. We carry our crosses the Christian way when we accept them from God gracefully and share our health, wealth, time and talents with others even when it costs us a struggle.

OT XII [C] Zec 12:10-11, 13: 1; Gal 3:26-29; Lk 9:18-24 (L-16)

Anecdotes: #1: "Who is Jesus?" In his teens, C.S. Lewis was a professed agnostic. He was influenced in his conversion to Christianity by G.K. Chesterton's book, *The Everlasting Man*, and by two of his Christian friends. After his conversion, he wrote a number of books defending Christianity. During the Second World War in his famous BBC radio talk, *Mere Christianity*, he said, "I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse." If we accept Jesus as a moral teacher, then we must necessarily accept Him as God, for great moral teachers do not tell lies. (John Rose in *John's Sunday Homilies*)

2: "Who do you say that I am?" On Sunday morning a man showed up at Church with both of his ears terribly blistered. So his pastor asked, "What happened to you Jim?" Jim said: "I was lying on the couch watching a ball game on TV while my wife was ironing nearby. I was totally engrossed in the game when she went out, leaving the iron near the phone. The phone rang, and keeping my eyes on the TV, I grabbed the hot iron and put it to my ear." "How dreadful," gasped the pastor. "But how did the other ear get burned?" "Well, you see, I'd no sooner hung up, the guy called back!" He just didn't get it. Lots of folks never get it and never understand how life really works, even at the simplest levels. That's why Jesus is pressing his followers — and us with a challenging question in today's Gospel: "Who do you say that I am?" (Msgr. Dennis Clarke)

3: "Suppose Jesus were to come here." Without the 19th century essayist Charles Lamb, William Shakespeare would be "missing in action." Mr. Lamb's essays snatched the 17th century playwright from undeserved obscurity after he had been famous for Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes. One night, Lamb and his guests were chatting about the Bard over Spanish port and Cuban cigars. "Supposing," one asked Lamb, "Shakespeare were to stroll into our dining room at this moment." The essayist replied, "We would raise a glass of port to the great man." "Supposing," asked another, "Jesus were to come here." Lamb answered, "We would all get down on our knees." There is the essential difference between the Man from Nazareth and all other great people you can think of. The Christ is God, and all others, no matter what their deeds, are but fools who strut on the stage for a brief time and then exit. (Fr. Gilhooly).

Introduction: Today's Gospel explains the basis of our Faith as the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, our Lord and our Savior. It also tells us that Christ Jesus became our Savior by his suffering, death and Resurrection. Finally, it outlines the three requirements for Christian discipleship, namely, denying oneself, taking up one's cross and following Jesus. The first reading gives us Zechariah's prophecy about the suffering and death of the Messiah: *"They will look on Him whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born."* The challenge given by Paul in today's second reading is to live in accordance with Jesus' teachings, tearing down unjust barriers of gender, race and class and making social justice a part of the Church's vision. In defending his teaching that Christ alone is the source of salvation, Paul appeals to several images in this reading. As clothing both envelops the whole body and expresses our identity to others, so Christ embraces our total reality, and renders differences among us insignificant. "Putting on Christ" means allowing him to begin to work in us as our Messiah, our personal Lord and Savior. This deep and vitalizing work of grace heals us of our hatred, prejudice, selfishness and whatever else blocks "God's reign" within and among us.

The first reading: Zechariah's prophecy refers to an obscure historical event which occurred several centuries before Christ. It was not originally a direct prediction of Jesus' Passion. But the passage gives insight into the meaning of redemptive suffering and its essential role in God's salvific plan. The evangelist John considered the passage, *"They will look on Him whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him...."* as fulfilled in the suffering and death of the Messiah.

However, Zechariah's description of the *pierced one* could have been applied to any one of several people who were martyred and mourned. Reginald Fuller in *Preaching the New Lectionary* suggests that Christians, who associate Zechariah's figure with Jesus and his redemptive death for sinners, might understand the mourning described here as the remorse which will, at the last judgment, overtake all those who have rejected Christ on earth. Zechariah's *pierced one*, in the light of today's Gospel, invites us to identify ourselves with our suffering Savior, Jesus during the moments of our pain and suffering.

The second reading: Writing to the Galatians, St. Paul teaches them and us that through Faith in Jesus we become the children of God. Hence, we have to live in accord with Jesus' teachings, tearing down unjust barriers of gender, race and class and making social justice a part of the Church's vision. As clothing covers parts of the body and expresses our identity to others, so Christ covers us and renders differences among us insignificant. "*Putting on Christ*" means allowing him to begin to work in us as our Messiah, personal Lord and Savior. This deep and vitalizing work of grace heals us of our hatred, prejudice, selfishness and whatever else blocks "God's reign" within and among us.

Exegesis: Two pertinent questions: In Luke's Gospel, it was immediately after a prayer session with his disciples that Jesus asked two questions about his perceived identity. But in the accounts of Matthew and Mark the incident occurred at Caesarea Philippi, presently called Banias, twenty-five miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. This city was founded by King Philip, the son of Herod the Great, to perpetuate his own memory and to honor the Roman emperor Caesar. It was situated on a beautiful terrace about 1150 feet above sea level on the southwest slope of Mount Hermon overlooking the Jordan valley. The city was a great pilgrimage center for pagans because it held temples for the Syrian gods Bal and Pan, one for the Roman God Jupiter and a marble temple for the emperor Caesar. Jesus realized that if his disciples did not know who he really was, then his entire ministry, suffering and death would be useless. Hence, he decided to ask a question in two parts.

The first question: "Who do the crowds say I am?" Their answer was, "Some say that you are John the Baptist, others say that you are Elijah, still others one of the prophets." John the Baptist was so great a figure that many Jews, and Herod their king, thought that John's spirit had entered the body of Jesus. Elijah, the

greatest of the prophets was believed to be the forerunner of the Messiah. (*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes"* –Mal 4:5). The phrase "one of the prophets" suggested that Jesus had a ministry like that of the former prophets. When the people identified Jesus with Elijah and with Jeremiah they were, according to their lights, paying him a great compliment and setting him in a high place because Elijah was none other than the expected forerunner of the Anointed One of God.

The second question: "Who do you say I am?" For the first time in their relationship Peter, speaking for the other disciples, declared publicly: *"You are God's Messiah."* Peter was the first apostle to recognize Jesus publicly as the *Anointed One* (also translated *Messiah* or *Christ*). *Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*. To say that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one of God was to say that Jesus was God who became Man to save sinners! However, Jesus was quick to explain to the disciples that he was not a political Messiah who would reestablish the Davidic kingdom after ousting the Romans. Instead, he was the Messiah who would redeem mankind by his suffering, death and Resurrection. Like the *"pierced one"* in the first reading, Jesus accepted suffering as part of his mission and out of fidelity toward the One Whom he called Father. Jesus' example provides a challenge for us all to accept the mystery of the cross when our turn comes to follow the Jesus by suffering with him.

The three requirements for Christian discipleship: Jesus promptly emphasized the fact that he was not the political, conquering Messiah of Jewish expectations by declaring three stringent requirements to be met by his disciples: *"If anyone wants to come with me he must deny himself, take up his cross every day and follow me."* Christian discipleship demands honesty of a disciple in order for him to practice self-control (*"to offer our bodies as a willing sacrifice to God"*), willingness to suffer, and readiness to follow Jesus by obeying his commandment of love. A) Self-denial: Self-denial requires that we evict selfish thoughts, evil desires and tendencies from our hearts and fill them with God. It also requires that we cleanse ourselves of all evil habits, enthrone God in our hearts and share Him with others. B) Carrying our cross with Jesus: The cross always means pain and suffering. Our sufferings become one with Jesus' sufferings on the cross with their saving power 1) when we accept them as His gift to us and endure them patiently, cheerfully if possible; 2) when we suffer by serving others selflessly, 3) when we give ourselves – our health, wealth, time and talents -- to others even when it costs us a struggle and 4) when we do penance to make reparation for our sins and the sins of the world. C) Following Jesus: As followers of Christ, we should live our lives according to the word of God, by obeying what is commanded by Jesus.

Since Mark's Gospel was written within vivid memory of both the horrors of the Jewish war against Rome and the persecution under Nero, when Christians were used as torches to light Nero's garden, the readers recognized that Jesus' predictions about Christian suffering had been tragically fulfilled in their own community.

Losing life, finding life: Christians started experiencing persecution by the Jews and the Romans while Luke wrote his Gospel. Hence, he emphasizes Jesus' teaching that a man who is faithful may die for his Faith in Jesus, but in dying he will live. The man who risks everything for Christ finds life. On the other hand the man who abandons his Faith for safety or security may live, but he is actually dying. History is full of noble souls who risked their lives for the sake of others. If certain scientists had not been prepared to take risks, many a medical cure would not exist. If mothers were not prepared to take risks, no child would ever be born. If we're honest with ourselves, we know that there are constant opportunities for us to choose to be true to the Gospel. But the world is essentially opposed to the Gospel and those who live out its truths.

Life Messages: #1: What does Jesus mean to us? Founder of a religion like Buddha and Confucius? Revolutionary Jewish reformer? One of the great teachers? Son of God and personal Savior? This can perhaps be broken down into other questions: "How do I really see Jesus? Is Jesus a living experience for me, walking with me, loving me, forgiving me, helping me and transforming my life and outlook? What difference does Jesus make in my life? Have I really given my life to him? Are there areas where I have excluded Him, where my life is not noticeably different from the lives of those who see Jesus as irrelevant? Who do we say that Jesus is through our daily life? Who do we say that He is when we are in the presence of those who don't know him, those who aren't interested in him? What does the way we live and behave say about who Jesus is? Is the joy, the love, the peace that we find in Jesus reflected in the way we live our lives? We are gathered here today in the name of Jesus. We have not come together to celebrate a memorial for a merely good man who died long ago. We are here to celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ, the Messiah, our Lord and personal Savior, in this Eucharistic celebration.

2) We need to experience Jesus as our Lord and Savior and surrender our life to him. The knowledge of Jesus as our Lord and personal Savior should become a living, personal experience for each Christian. With God's ongoing grace, we learn to perceive Jesus this way by listening to him through the daily, meditative reading of the Bible, by talking to him through daily, personal and family prayers, by

offering to him our lives on the altar in the Holy Mass and by being reconciled to him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The next step for us is to surrender our lives to Jesus by rendering humble and loving service to others with the strong conviction that Jesus is present in every person. Our final step is to praise and thank God in all the events of our lives, both good and bad, realizing that God's loving hand is behind every event of our lives.

3: Are we ready to take up our crosses and follow Jesus? Do we have enough Faith to offer up a genuine sacrifice for Christ's sake? Can a Church in today's self-centered culture ask its people to sacrifice something for the sake of the Gospel? Jesus' challenge to all would-be disciples requires more than a "feel-good" spirituality. A true disciple asks, "Am I willing to sacrifice something for the Kingdom?" What made it possible for first-century Christians to choose a martyr's death? What has kept generations of Christians from losing Faith and falling apart when confronted by the violence and hatred of this world? How can we realize even the day-to-day sacrifices asked by our Faith when they demand things we don't want to do? Can we sacrifice some of our time in order to visit a homeless shelter or soup kitchen? Can we sacrifice our job security and refuse to "go along" with a policy that is unjust? Can we sacrifice our need to be in control and let Christ do with us what he will? Can we refuse to let our children watch television programs filled with sex and violence?

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