

Cycle B 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Is 50:5-9a

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together. Who disputes my right? Let that man confront me. See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong?

Responsorial Psalm Ps 114:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. (9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

I love the LORD because he has heard my voice in supplication, Because he has inclined his ear to me the day I called.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

The cords of death encompassed me; the snares of the netherworld seized upon me; I fell into distress and sorrow, And I called upon the name of the LORD, "O LORD, save my life!"

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

Gracious is the LORD and just; yes, our God is merciful. The LORD keeps the little ones; I was brought low, and he saved me.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

For he has freed my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

Reading 2 Jas 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, " but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

Gospel Mk 8:27-35

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

"Who do you say I am?"

All of us have some idea about who Jesus is. Do you remember his "I am" statements? *"I am the Bread of Life."* *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* And perhaps most dramatic, *"Before Abraham came to be, I am!"* These statements declare who Jesus is, that he is much more than an ordinary human being. But the question Jesus asks today is very personal: *"Who do you say that I am?"* When we approach Jesus in prayer, at Communion or at Reconciliation, who do you, Jesus asks, who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter responded, *"You are the Christ."* Jesus accepts that answer. It's not complete, but it is accurate. Jesus accepts Peter's response because it leads to his mission, the reason he came. He is the Christ, in Greek, "the anointed one", or in Hebrew, "Messiah." He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit for a purpose. Jesus' purpose might surprise you. It certainly surprised Peter and the other apostles. They thought of the Messiah as a triumphant figure, someone who would vindicate them in their struggle against Roman dominance. But Jesus does not see his role that way. Yes, he is the Christ, but his mission was this: "to suffer greatly...be rejected...and killed"

When Peter hears this, he tries to dissuade Jesus. But Jesus rebukes Peter and calls him, *"Satan."* Strong words. The first reading tells about a man who says *"I set my face like flint."* That man is Jesus; he set his face toward Jerusalem even though it meant horrendous suffering. Suffering, rejection and death - not an appealing mission. It does, however, contain a note of hope - to *"rise after three days."* God loves us so much that Jesus offers that mission - with its promise - not only to the disciples, but also to you and me. *"Follow me,"* he says. *"Take up your cross and follow me."*

For many churches a main challenge is that there are many more families registered than families who actively participate in ministries, Faith Formation or donate regularly. Many have a diverse population ranging from families with a few to many children, single-parent families, single adults of all ages, seniors, people speaking many languages can be recognized. No doubt people have crosses to bear. And in spite of thinking we don't have the time, many of us somehow make the time to participate. But what I must point out, when some of the less-

participating families do appear...and we recognize them often... these people are being transformed right here after some amazing and powerful encounters with Jesus. They then become more active stewards of the Catholic Faith and contributing as parishioners.

I believe it is our St. Andrew spiritual community and the outreach of our ministries sharing in the lives of so many people around us that makes us visible in our community. As today's second reading tells us, "*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?*" This compassionate attitude we have toward the world around us has been very much a part of our tradition, and it reflects the way the Catholic Church has related to the world since Vatican II. During Vatican II, controversy surrounded the development of the document *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church in the World, because it focused on what our Catholic Church's mission was to the world, particularly to developing countries. Getting consensus from the Cardinals was tough. Archbishop Camara of Brazil was reported to say in exasperation, "Are we to spend our whole time discussing internal church problems while 2/3s of the world is dying of hunger?" Vatican II also recognized that while the Church offers the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, the Church has much to learn from and share with the world's diversity of education, vast cultures and broad life experience. But possibly most importantly, *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes the important role of the Catholic laity being a "leaven" in the world....we are the ones who get our hands dirty....we help transform the world from within for the improvement of the human condition and the work for justice. We are *empowered by the Holy Spirit, and we are called to reach out with charity and justice to serve all in need, to foster unity in diversity, and to be responsible stewards of God's many gifts.*"

We have so many ministries that touch people so profoundly that their hearts have been converted, their faith is deepened and their lives are transformed....this is true for both the ones who have received the help and assistance, and the ministers themselves. For you and me the Christian life, as Jesus makes clear, is not a matter of dreaming about great deeds. It is about taking up one's cross and following Jesus today, being the Body of Christ bringing His love to the world. Please, won't you come join us on the journey to tell Jesus who we say He is?