



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

September 4, 2022

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

All of us have crosses in our lives. Crosses occur when our happiness and our hope are threatened in ways we cannot avoid. For some of us, our crosses are relatively small. For others, they are overwhelming. Sickness can be a cross. So can disharmony in our family or an important relationship. A cross can be a burden of low self-esteem or depression. It can be a habit of jealousy eating at us or the fear of growing old. Whatever our crosses are, they are with us. When we wake up every morning, they face us. We may for a while forget about them, but soon they reappear at our side, claiming our attention. If we are able to dispel or escape our crosses, we certainly should. But most crosses are not easy to shake off.

Jesus' words in today's gospel about crosses seem harsh and demanding. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." At first, it seems like Jesus is giving us a cross to test us, to see if we can carry it. If we cannot do so, we are unable to follow him. But this understanding is certainly false. God does not give us crosses. God is the source of goodness, not the source of evil. Crosses come to us because of our imperfection and the imperfection of our world. God does not send us crosses. They come to us because we are human and weak.

So, what is Jesus trying to say when he talks about the cross? He is offering us a way of dealing with crosses in our lives. The important word in Jesus' admonition is the word "carry"—whoever does not *carry* his own cross. What Jesus is trying to tell us is that it is only by carrying our cross, by taking it up, that we will be free. Now you and I usually do anything other than carry our cross. We deny the cross, pretending it's not there. We try to go on with life as usual. But the denial only pushes down our fear and our anger within us. It eventually boils up and explodes, and our life is in shambles. We stare at the cross, saying over and over, "How can this be happening to me?" But our staring only paralyzes us and robs us of life. We try to drag the cross behind us, pushing ahead, saying "This is not going to stop me!" But in time, the cross wears us out, and we collapse in exhaustion.

The only effective way to deal with the cross is to carry the cross, to consent to it. We must lift the cross to our shoulders and say, "Yes, this is my cross, and since I cannot avoid it, I will accept it." Once we put the cross on our shoulders, we are free to move forward into life. Yes, at times the cross is heavy. It is a burden. But it need not prevent us from love and hope. And Christ, who carried his own cross, will be with us. You see, as long as we deny the cross, or stare at the cross, or drag the cross, Jesus can do nothing. But once we take up the cross, and begin to carry it, Jesus is immediately at our side, supporting us, and saying, "Courage. Let's take this one step at a time. Follow me into glory."