



Father Joseph's Outline for the Sunday after the Cross Homily

Mark (8:34-38; 9:1) - Sunday 9/21/2008

“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

- Think about this verse for a moment! What does it mean to your life?
- What is Jesus saying in regards to your decision to follow Him?
- Is it an easy decision or is it a difficult decision? Does it cost you anything or is it cost-free?

What Jesus Christ is saying here means that your decision to follow Him is costly!

- How much does it cost me/you to follow Jesus?

The cost is very high. It is as high as denying yourself and carrying a cross just like Him.

- Well, what does that mean?

Let's read what the Saints have to say about this verse:

“To deny oneself means to give up one's bad habits; to root out of the heart all of the things that tie us to the world; not to cherish bad thoughts and desires; to suppress every evil thought; to avoid all occasions of sin; not to desire or to do anything out of self-love, but to do everything out of love for God. To deny oneself, as the St. Paul said “to be dead to sin . . . but alive to God.” -St. Innocent of Alaska

“Fr. J., what does that mean? Are you saying to follow Jesus means that we need to let go of the joy that comes to us through the carnal passions, not to enjoy the glory that people might give to us, the fame, the wealth, the power, and the control that we might be able to gain?”

Fr. J. says, “I am not saying this, but Jesus is saying it!” When Christ said to us that we need to deny oneself, it means that we need to let go of all those things that make us attached to the earth and prevent us from ascending up to the heavens.

“But Fr. J., this is hard, isn't it?”

Fr. J. agrees it is a hard thing to do. Following Jesus is hard, and it takes work! But let's consider what the other option is. If we win whatever this life gives us and lose what Christ is offering to us, then what are we gaining? What is the benefit of a beautiful body when Christ is not glorified through its life, conduct, and actions? What is the benefit of wealth that is not serving or witnessing to Christ in this world? What is the benefit of science, technology, or knowledge that does not bring people closer to Christ or make them know Him better?

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“So, Fr. J., are you sure that this is the teaching of the Church that following Christ is a hard work?”

Let’s again see what the teachers and saints of the Church say about that.

“Nothing comes without effort. The help of God is always ready and always near, but it is given only to those who seek and work, and only to those seekers who, after putting all their powers to the test, then cry out with their whole heart:
“Lord, help us.”
-St. Theophan the Recluse (from the 19th Century)

“So, Fr. J., is Jesus today telling us that following Him is a costly process? When we hear this, how do you expect us to continue to come back to the Church instead of being discouraged? Don’t you think that you should make it a little bit easy on us?”

Yes. It is hard to hear what the Lord said to us and not to be challenged. You need to know that following Jesus is hard work.

“What is the purpose of this hard work that Jesus is calling us to do?”

The purpose of Christ’s invitation for joining Him is an invitation to rebel against the devil, his invisible angels, and his unseen power. Jesus is calling us to become free from the devil by being free from sin. Satan can trick us only when we sin. Jesus is showing us how to be wise to his tricks by rejecting all actions of sin.

“But, Fr. J. fighting Satan is hard, is not it?”

Yes it is hard to fight Satan and sin, but it is a very fulfilling experience because you have Christ on your side. You will be rewarded with many blessings, joyful times, happiness in this life, and the greatest among all- the inheritance of eternal life that He will grant to us.

Conclusion

The cross is always followed by the event of the resurrection. But for the resurrection to happen, it must be preceded by purification of our heart, soul, and mind. In the case of a sick person, he needs to be healed from his sickness before he can leave his bed of sickness and walk away. The same thing is true for us. We need to be healed from our sins and weaknesses before we can be resurrected from the death of sin.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, You command us to take our cross and follow You. You know that this is a hard decision for us. We are willing in our minds to do what You ask of us, but we do not know how to do it, and we do not have the courage to leave everything for Your sake. Therefore, we ask You to bless our intention. We ask You to give us the strength to make Your call a reality in our life. We ask You to guide us on Your path. Help us, O Lord, to appreciate the forgiveness of sins that You grant us. Make us worthy, O Lord, to be with You and with Your Father and Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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