

Take up your cross daily and follow me

*“If anyone want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves and take up their cross
and follow me.”
(Mark 8.34)*

SPRINGLINE PARISH /2ND SUNDAY AFTER LENT/25 FEBRUARY 2018
Readings: Genesis 17.1-7, 15-16; Romans 4.13-25; Mark 8.31-38

What does this sentence mean for me?

What did Jesus want to tell us?

Many of you will know most of what I am going to say. But each of us will have his/her own interpretation to these words of Jesus. We don't have time in a sermon to find out what each one thinks of these extraordinary words of Jesus, although it would have been wonderful and inspiring.

The cross

The 'cross' immediately reminds us of 'Good Friday' and all that happened on that day two thousand years ago – the passion, suffering and torture and crucifixion that led to the death of Christ on the cross.

Today, paradoxically, as there are so many paradoxes in today's world, the 'cross' is a fashion symbol, a punk symbol, a stylish sign of rebellion, provocation ... you find gold crosses, silver crosses, all types of ornate crosses of all materials....

I wonder how many of our youths and adults know that 2000 years ago, the cross was an utterly distasteful sign and symbol, one of punishment for the worst crimes...wonder how many today know that a man named 'Jesus' died on the cross for our salvation, that he gave up his life for us...

What about the 'cross' in our lives?

Which are 'our' crosses?

Does the cross answer the 'big why' of human suffering and pain?

All of us have our own crosses, big or small, but we have them.

For some, it is an unexpected or long drawn lack of physical or emotional well being.

For others, it is a problematic child in the family – may be a son/daughter who is a drug addict....it could be a son or daughter who is rebellious or challenging....it could be a child who has a 'down' syndrome or any other invalidities...we all have our crosses....for some one else it may be the place of work that is terribly unhealthy....it may be a manager who is authoritarian and unjust....for someone else the cross may come in the form of a chronic illness or addiction to something....for someone else it is a marriage that went wrong...or the death of a loved one that makes us cry to heaven with that heart-wrenching 'why'.....for others it is the pain of 'waiting' for someone or something to happen, a new job, owning a new house, paying off a mortgage or loan...we

can go on and on...the list will never end...but the fact of the matter is that crosses, oh don't we have them!

To carry the cross

What does Jesus mean that we have to 'carry' our cross if we want to follow Jesus as if there is a choice!

Yes, the crosses that we have are our daily duties, our daily tasks, daily responsibilities...old age... a difficult parent or relative...it is 'the daily life of every day'...it is not easy at all it is accepting the ramifications of life with faith in God...

Following Jesus ...

But Jesus says that if we want to 'follow' him as a disciple, as a Christian, we have to carry our cross. But it is not just a question of taking up your cross, no not at all, it is about 'following Jesus'. To follow Jesus, we have to take up our daily crosses. That is the clear sign of a disciple of Christ. It is a double commitment: to 'take' up the 'cross' and to 'follow' Jesus.

Many of us try to avoid the crosses.

But we forget that pure gold that is 'the best' is refined in the flames with the hottest temperatures. We forget too that the great Christians are formed and refined in the crucible of suffering and pain through their faith in Jesus.

Don't we remember chapter 11 of Paul's letter to the Hebrews, that fantastic chapter that I recommend all of you to read, verses that speak about 'so great a cloud of witnesses' who underwent all types of trials, all types of crosses, mocked or scourged, stoned, sawn in two, killed by the sword, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering over deserts and mountains.....and Paul writes in Hebrews 12. verse 1 : "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, (2)looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God...(4) in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood..." and comparing with earthly fathers, he writes, "(10)but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (11) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it..

What is the meaning of 'following Jesus carrying the cross'?

It means obedience and surrender.

It means love and acceptance.

It means waiting and patience.

It means doing things we have to do or accepting the exigencies of our life 'in order to follow Jesus and to be like him' Like him who carried the cross, died on the cross and rose again in glorious resurrection and power, there is the same 'potential', the same 'possibility', the same 'miracle', the same 'blessing' hidden behind our crosses. Like the cocoon is a passage towards being a butterfly, the cross becomes a bridge to pass on to glory and heavenly vision and the kingdom of God, to light when we accept it in order to

follow Jesus...when we do that, people 'see' us and they see 'Christ', they see God reflected in our lives....

It is like a piece of carbon through long period of intense heat and ultimate compression turn out to be the most glorious diamond, or the oyster that breeds in the in the bottom of the sea of the sea where it breeds for food or for tends within itself and producing the most lovely pearls inside their shells...

The cross, suffering, pain when accepted in loving obedience, loving abandonment, loving acceptance and loving surrender for the love of Christ becomes the source of all good things, the highest and the best in human beings and Christians....

Joni

Remember Joni Eareckson Tada who at the age of 16 had that tragic jump in to a pool that left her quadriplegic for the rest of her life but who now has become a 'living symbol' of Christian success stories reaching out to millions who have heard her or read her books.....

In her early years of coming to grips with her quadriplegic situation, Joni used to be inspired by a poem by Madame Guyon. She quotes this poem in her book "A Step Further". Madame Guyon who wrote this inspiring poem was a French noblewoman. This saintly woman was arrested in 1688 and falsely accused of heresy, sorcery, and adultery by jealous church officials. When was convicted, and as a result spent the next ten years in prison. During those long and weary years of her confinement, she penned the poem I am about to read. It is an eloquent expression of the strength God will give to the suffering heart that waits on Him.

A little bird

A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air;
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be
Because, my God, it pleases Thee.

Naught have I else to do;
I sing the whole day long;
And He whom most I love to please,
Doth listen to my song:
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing.

My cage confines me round;
Abroad I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound,

My heart's at liberty;
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul.
Oh! It is good to soar
These bolts and bars above,
To Him whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love;
And in Thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom, of the mind.

Madame Guyon, quoted by Joni in "A Step Further".

Joni writes in her book: "Oscar Wilde wrote: 'In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.' To paraphrase his thought, "I suggest," Joni writes, "there are likewise only two joys. One is having God answer all your prayers; the other is not receiving the answer to all your prayers. I believe this because I have found that God knows my needs infinitely better than I know them. And He is utterably dependable, no matter which direction our circumstances take us."

If these were my words, you could have said, "What do you know Sebastian about my problem? Why don't you just shut up?" But these are the words of a beautiful young girl tragically brought down in her 16th year and who ploughed through her pain and her suffering and finally discovered God's purposes even in the most terrible crosses that came her way....so you can accept her words....

There are so many others who accepted their 'cross' in obedience and faith and far surpassed the highest limits their crosses becoming springboards to glory and Christian witness and holiness....we don't have to look far...we have neighbours who cheerfully carry their crosses daily and follow Christ...these are real believers, real Christians who change the world

[ST Mattapally]