

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Luke 9:23)

Then He (Jesus) said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection – Jesus lays down the condition for true Discipleship

By His life on earth, Jesus shows us how to live as true Christians. The life of Jesus during His time on earth is a very powerful example of a life lived entirely out of love for God and manifested in the service of others. No ordinary human intellect can really understand the extent of the divine sacrifice made when the only begotten Son of the Most High assumed lowly human flesh in order to redeem the human race. Jesus, Son of God, does not regard equality with God something to be grasped but rather He willingly emptied Himself of all glory, took the form of a slave of God in coming to us as a human being, and was obedient to the Father even to death on the Cross (cf. Philippians 2:6-8). With pure love, comes absolute obedience. Thus Jesus says: *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15)*. If we are very vigilant in protecting our 'rights' and quick to complain about 'unfairness', we put ourselves in a situation that makes it difficult to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus sets the condition for those who want to be His true followers. *If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me (Luke 9:23)*. Just as Jesus ascends Calvary carrying His own Cross, everyone who wants to follow Him must carry one's own cross. *No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master (Matthew 10:24)*. Jesus performed many stupendous miracles on earth but it was His loving act of redemption of the human race through His holy death on the Cross that renders the greatest glory to God. *Because of this, God greatly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11)*. Similarly, we will also render great glory to God and will be greatly rewarded if we faithfully and obediently carry our own crosses daily as the divine will of God is embedded in the cross.

It is impossible to take up our cross without first denying ourselves. It is only possible to deny ourselves if we follow God's commandment to love God with all our being, and to love others for the sake of God. *The way we came to know love was that He laid down His life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (1 John 3:16)*. In other words, we are to put the interests of God and others on top of ours. *Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others (Philippians 2:3-4)*. Pride and selfishness will find no place in the heart of a true disciple of Christ. By His teaching and example, Jesus goes to great lengths to teach us humility. *Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart (Matthew 11:29)*. If we can develop the holy exercise of reminding ourselves how Jesus, Son of the Most High allowed Himself to be subjected to a sea of torments and humiliation, we can humble our proud spirits and develop greater strength to carry our own crosses.

We will encounter disapproval from the world when we take up our cross but in our cross we will find the power and wisdom of God. *But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)*. Those without faith cannot understand the ways of God. In Christ Crucified they can only see a failed preacher whose foolish doctrine runs contrary to the wisdom of the world and whose tragic end is a testimony against what He stands for. But for those with faith, Christ Crucified manifests the power and wisdom of God. Similarly, when we take up our cross, we will not win accolades from the world but will be met with its disapproval and derision, placing obstacles on the true path. However, once we carry our own crosses, we too can find the power and wisdom of God in helping us live a genuine Christian life.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, Your Cross is Your throne on earth. Through it, You put an end to the dominion of the kingdom of darkness and bestow upon us the claim to the glorious, eternal inheritance God has prepared for each and every one of His children. You suffered great rejection and humiliation when You carried Your cross. I, too will be treated the same way. But I will not give up my cross for any treasure in this world. It is the only way in which to follow You to Your glorious Kingdom. Through my cross, I will find the power and wisdom to live a good Christian life in testimony to You. Mary, Mother of Salvation, you who are the perfect disciple of Jesus, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.