

In Nomine Iesu

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Text: St. Luke 9:18-26

And it happened, as He was alone praying, *that* His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"¹⁹ So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some *say* Elijah; and others *say* that one of the old prophets has risen again."²⁰ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God."²¹ And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one,²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."²³ Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."²⁴ "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."²⁵ "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"²⁶ "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and in *His* Father's, and of the holy angels.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

In the gospel today, we heard Jesus calling the disciples to follow Him. Those men left their boats, they "forsook all," and followed Jesus. Over the next three years those men would watch Jesus perform even greater miracles than the great catch of fish there at the Sea of Galilee. Those men would be taught by Jesus Himself about His blessed work, commanded by His Father. And they would be there to watch this Jesus die on the cross. From that evening of Good Friday until the evening of Easter Sunday they were in fear of their own deaths at the hands of those who hated Jesus so much. They each would meet Jesus in His resurrection, seeing with his own eyes their Lord and God, the one who died and rose again. Finally, each of those men, with the exception of John, would be singled out for death – and the reason for each death would be due to the confession of faith in Jesus, the Christ of God.

In these verses from Luke 9, the events of Holy Week were still a few years away. But here already we see Jesus teaching them, preparing them for what would be.

The preparation of these men takes the form of a catechism questioning. Jesus asks: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" The answer is that Jesus is considered a great man, a prophet, maybe even John the Baptist or Elijah resurrected. But the crowds as yet do not confess Jesus as God. Then Jesus asks: "But who do you say that I am?" Now the question is personal. And Peter answers: "the Christ of God."

Jesus is the Christ of God, the promised Messiah. Peter is right when he identifies Jesus in this way. Jesus then uses this confession to teach more about Himself and His work: "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." This is the core of the Christian faith. This is what we confess each Sunday through the Apostles' or Nicene creeds. Jesus suffered, He was crucified, dead, and buried, then rose again the third day.

Jesus teaches the disciples of the way of His own cross. He came to this world to walk that path, to allow Himself to be led to Golgotha in order to die for the sins and the sinners of this world. By His suffering and crucifixion He would win for us and for all people the salvation we cannot achieve on our own. The cross of Christ was where He won salvation, a salvation that is handed out to this day through the blessed Word and sacraments, as we will receive shortly in the Lord's Supper.

But Jesus goes on to teach what happens as we follow Him, the One who went the way of the cross. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." To follow Jesus means that we also will a cross. As one theologian put it:

"A 'Yes' to the Cross of Christ Is Also a 'Yes' to My Cross." In other words, to confess as did St. Peter, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, means finally that we are willing to undergo our own crosses. We do so because we have become convinced of the truth that Jesus teaches here: "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"

The gaining of the whole world is something that is sought by many. They have put their trust, their energy, in the pursuit of this world and its glory and

riches. They do this, by the millions, even though we see that such a pursuit always ends in futility – futility because it is so true: we cannot take it with us.

There is an episode in the movie “A Man for All Season” which I believe I have told several times over the years, but it bears repeating. The main character of the movie is Sir Thomas More. Thomas More was a devoted Roman Catholic who could not in good conscience condone the divorces of King Henry VIII of England in the 1530s. Early in the movie More encourages a young and ambitious man to remain a school teacher – to be faithful to his calling in that area, to find happiness and contentment in a small, and by worldly standards, insignificant post. But the young man in his vain ambition was tempted to betray Sir Thomas More by being promised a fine position in Wales. In the movie, Thomas More, after finding out about the betrayal confronts this young man and quotes our Lord to Him: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world [and loses his soul]. And you gave your soul for Wales.” More is eventually beheaded by the king who would seek another spiritual leader to comply with his wish to have church approval for his divorces. Coincidentally, today, June 22, is the feast day for commemorating Thomas More.

The world in which we live is not our ally when it comes to following Jesus. The world will seek to put all manner of obstacles in the path of our attempts to faithfully confess and follow our Savior. Little compromises may lead to greater ones as our consciences are slowly numbed by the number of our sins. And while the whole world is nothing in comparison to the glories of heaven and eternal life, yet with our limited knowledge and understanding we will consider that the various treasures of this world outweigh the treasures of heaven. We may find ourselves unpleasantly surprised at what we actually accept as a substitute for salvation and eternal life.

It is in our confession of Jesus that we will have our crosses to carry. The crosses will come in our vocations, our lives as the people of God with the others who are in our lives. How or with what will you compromise in order to have what you consider a more comfortable life, a more peaceful life, a more stress-free life? Will you seek other pastures when your spouse seems unlovable? Will you betray co-workers, lying about them, or not speaking the whole truth, in order for you to gain at their expense? Is it worth the kingdom of God? Or maybe we will be

tempted to give up our self-respect, our self-control, even our bodies, in order to be considered more popular with our school friends. Too soon we will find ourselves looking back at our compromises with shame and loathing, hating ourselves for being so weak, so willing to trade in the Christ of God for something that may last hours, days, or at most, years.

Jesus' words to us are a powerful proclamation about what such denial of Him may mean: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels."

Our crosses are not easy. But what we will find is that as we carry them, it is the strength and power of Christ that bears the burden and allows us to continue on the path of the kingdom of God. Not only that, our Lord will be with us to pick us up, to cover us with His own righteousness, His own goodness, His own determination to go through the cross, to death, and on to eternal life through the resurrection of the dead.

I mentioned earlier how the disciples would suffer and die for Jesus. But remember, too, that each of them ran away from Jesus. Peter himself was rebuked for his stating the lie of Satan to Jesus. John and all the other disciples left Jesus alone in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas and the other enemies of Jesus arrested Him. Whether we read of Old Testament saints or New Testament ones, we find that their lives of cross-bearing in the path of Jesus are ones that rely on the power of Jesus, on the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation for each and every one of us.

"A 'Yes' to the Cross of Christ Is Also a 'Yes' to My Cross." When our times of trial and temptation come, our Lord stands by us to give us strength, and to pick us up when we fall. He has no desire to live you behind; but will continue to seek you out, to bring you with Him. He was rejected so that we are accepted through faith in Him. He was crucified so that our death by faith in Him is our doorway to eternal life. And He rose from the grave victorious, giving us the victory – one we know by faith now, and one we will see with our eyes in heaven, as we see our Savior face to face. God be with us as we take up our crosses and follow Jesus, the Son of God. In His name. Amen.