

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

See Eph 1:17-18

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel**

Matt 16:21-27; L124A

**Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.**

**Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him,**

**“God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”**

**He turned and said to Peter,**

**“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.**

**You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”**

**Then Jesus said to his disciples,**

**“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.**

**For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,**

**but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**

**What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?**

**Or what can one give in exchange for his life?**

**For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct.”**



**Reflecting on the Gospel**

Sometimes we are asked, “Do you want the good news first, or the bad?” How we answer probably depends on the gravity of the situation, our own mood and temperament, and whether we want to get the bad news out of the way so we can enjoy the good or hear the good first so that it softens the bad. In this gospel Jesus definitely gives the bad news first: he will suffer and die; his followers must carry their cross and lose their life for the sake of others. We not only have to hear the bad news before hearing the good news, we also must live the bad news before we receive the best news possible: that we will share in Jesus’ risen Life.

Who wouldn’t recoil, like Peter, when Jesus says that he would “suffer greatly . . . and be killed,” especially when he says that this is also the lot of those who faithfully follow him. Jesus’ curt command to Peter—“Get behind me, Satan!”—points to the crux of the challenge: we are to think like God, not like humans. In God’s saving plan, we must lose our life for Jesus’ sake—only in this way can we share in Jesus’ risen Life. No human instinctively understands or naively embraces this. God’s love alone reveals this mystery and strengthens us as we surrender ourselves to it.

If we only focus on the cost of discipleship—dying to self; losing one’s life for the sake of another; daring to be a countercultural sign in a culture overtaken with more and better possessions, constant entertainment, self-indulgence—we’ll become as disillusioned and discouraged as Jeremiah in the first reading. We always need to hear Jesus’ *whole* message about the paschal mystery: we must lose our life in order to find it. The suffering and death *always* lead to new Life. We know this because Jesus has already shown us the way. His prophecy about his passion and death *includes* his announcement of being raised to new Life. The good news-bad news question really is a non-question for Jesus’ disciples. Whatever suffering and death we embrace, we know includes a share in Jesus’ risen Life.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

This gospel begins with a clear statement of what we call the paschal mystery: Jesus will “suffer,” “be killed,” and “be raised.” Peter recoils at this statement of Jesus’ fate. So do we! Suffering and death is hardly an attraction that we would seek and make central in our daily lives. Yet it must be, for Jesus attests that the only way to have our life is to lose it. Why would we want to make losing our life—suffering and death—something central to our daily living? Like Peter, we tend to limit our vision by focusing only on the suffering and death, only on the bad news. The fullness of the paschal mystery always leads through suffering and death to new Life. And this is good news, indeed—the best of good news!

Authentic discipleship doesn’t require us to seek suffering. Being faithful to Jesus will bring enough as it is. This is so because living and witnessing to Gospel values challenges so many values society touts are the ones that will bring us happiness. Ultimately, though, we find that only living Gospel values brings us lasting happiness, even though we must die to self in the process. All who wish to be faithful to Jesus’ call to Gospel living must be prepared to suffer—and also be prepared to receive new Life. The Life Jesus offers is worth any price!

**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** suffer greatly; be killed; be raised; Get behind me, Satan; loses his life . . . find it

**To the point:** Who wouldn't recoil, like Peter, when Jesus says that he would "suffer greatly . . . and be killed," especially when he says that this is also the lot of those who faithfully follow him. Jesus' curt command to Peter—"Get behind me, Satan!"—points to the crux of the challenge: we are to think like God, not like humans. In God's saving plan, we must lose our life for Jesus' sake—only in this way can we share in Jesus' risen Life. No human instinctively understands or naively embraces this. God's love alone reveals this mystery and strengthens us as we surrender ourselves to it.

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** Jeremiah suffered for his prophetic words and mission, and wanted to quit his call to be God's prophet. But God's word continued to burn within him, compelling him to speak again in God's name. Likewise, followers of Jesus will be tempted to quit their baptismal call in face of the demands of dying to self. But then the promise of a share in Jesus' risen Life compels them to continue Jesus' saving mission.

**to experience:** Authentic discipleship does not mean that we need to hunt for suffering. Choosing to be faithful to Gospel living (the mission of Jesus) will bring enough suffering as it is. But we must never forget that it also brings new Life.

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** Jesus does not hedge what he has to say to the disciples: I must go to Jerusalem and be killed and then raised, and you must follow in my footsteps. Peter reacts as did Jeremiah in his day: Lord, you have "duped" me; I thought we were heading for glory and now you promise degradation and death. Jeremiah cries, What kind of God are you? Peter cries, What kind of Messiah are you?

To these questions the responsorial psalm replies that you are the God for whom we thirst; the God whose kindness is "greater . . . than life" itself; the God who alone ultimately satisfies us. If we maintain our focus on this God, we will have, as did Jeremiah, as did Jesus, as ultimately did Peter, the courage to lose our life. For we will have learned that in our very thirsting for God we already taste the greater Life promised us.

**to psalmist preparation:** This Sunday's gospel challenges you not to be naive about discipleship: its cost is suffering and death. But you are also promised a reward that far surpasses this cost: life itself (gospel), and a love even greater than life (psalm). Can you already taste what is in store? Can the assembly hear you thirsting for it as you sing?

**ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS**

- At the call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus, I respond with mere human thinking ("God forbid, Lord!") when I . . . I respond according to God's way of thinking when I . . .
- I've experienced life coming from "death" when . . .
- In the midst of the challenges and difficulties of faithfully following Jesus, I have felt God's loving strength when . . .

**PRESIDERS**

My preaching is honest about the real cost/demands of discipleship in that . . . My preaching reminds the assembly of the new Life God offers when . . .

**DEACONS**

Diaconal service has challenged me to deny and lose self by . . . It has also helped me come to a deeper share in risen Life in that . . .

**HOSPITALITY MINISTERS**

Extending genuine hospitality offers those assembling for liturgy the strength of God's love when I . . .

**MUSIC MINISTERS**

My fidelity to music ministry calls me to die to myself when . . . This same fidelity brings me new Life when . . .

**ALTAR MINISTERS**

Serving is a way of losing my life for the sake of Jesus and others in that . . . I gain . . .

**LECTORS**

My preparation time with Scripture challenges my thinking "as human" and develops my thinking "as God does" in that . . .

**EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION**

My manner of distributing Holy Communion draws me to think like God when I . . .