

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 16, 2018 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and caring Father, thank you for gathering us together to share your Word. Teach us your ways and give us the strength to embrace the cross when it becomes our path. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

Facilitator: Our first reading speaks about a faithful servant who suffers for his fidelity to God. In the Gospel, Peter makes an important profession of faith about Jesus. Jesus teaches his **second lesson** on the nature of true discipleship, namely, a willingness to carry one's cross. In the second reading, James states that authentic faith must express itself in good works.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:5-9

This reading is an excerpt from the third of the Servant Songs of Second Isaiah. The servant's message evidently meets with opposition and results in persecution. But he absorbs all the physical and mental abuse directed at him without retaliating. The insults don't really touch him, because he is confident that God will help and vindicate him.

This ties in with Jesus' prediction of the passion in the Gospel. Jesus, too, is confident that God will vindicate him by raising him from the dead. The New Testament sees Jesus as the suffering servant *par excellence*.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 116

This is a thanksgiving prayer of one who has recovered from a serious illness. It reflects the feelings of both the servant and Jesus in the first and third readings.

SECOND READING: James 2:14-18

James responds to a misunderstanding in the early church about the true nature of faith. It seems some within the community think that faith only means correct belief as articulated in orthodox doctrine.

James insists that authentic faith must express itself in good works. Action and right conduct are essential elements of faith. Faith that does not express itself in good works is a false or dead faith. James gives a concrete example of how faith must lead to care for a needy brother or sister.

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION: Mark 8: 27-35

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel then all pause to reflect...

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.

A participant reads the Gospel again then all pause to reflect...

GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 8: 27-35

Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.
After having been consistently rejected and misunderstood despite all he has said and done, Jesus

starts to proclaim the necessity of the suffering of the Son of Man.

Today's passage has two parts. The first deals with Peter's profession of faith. The second involves Jesus' teaching on the true nature of his messiah-ship—how it will involve suffering and how the cross will also be the lot of those who will follow him.

In the first part, Jesus seeks to find out how his actions and words are being understood by the people. Peter tells him that many of the people think that he is a prophet raised from the dead. Then Jesus asks, "And who do you, my inner circle, say I am?" Peter, serving as spokesperson for his brothers, answers: "You are the Christ." This means that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

Even though Peter answers correctly, his reaction to Jesus' reference to a *suffering* Messiah clearly shows how much he needs to grow in his understanding of Jesus' messiahship. Peter is repulsed at the very idea of a *wounded* and *suffering* Messiah, as well as a discipleship that will involve carrying one's cross. It will take a lot of time and the action of the Holy Spirit for Peter and his friends to embrace the idea of a wounded and suffering Messiah and the belief that disciples will also suffer for being followers of Jesus. This teaching on the importance of the cross is the **second lesson** in a series of teachings on the characteristics of true discipleship.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.

2. Name a cross that you carry and share how you are transforming it into good for others. What helps you to deal with the painful experiences of life?

3. a) For James, true faith must express itself in good works. What does this mean in your life? How do you express your faith in good works?
b) It is clear from James that for him, faith must express itself in the care of the poor. How do you seek to live this piece of the Gospel?

4. How would you answer the question Jesus asked Peter: "Who do you say that I am?"

5. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday's Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

JOURNALING: *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel. Suggestions: Reach out to someone carrying a big cross at this time.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

Share a prayer, however brief on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life.* Or: *Lord, when I want to grumble help me to remember all the blessings in my life.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION:

Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).

Pray especially for people carrying the cross of persecution because of their belief in Jesus.

CONCLUDE WITH A SONG ©