



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday's Gospel comes directly after last Sunday's Gospel. If you remember, last Sunday, we heard Jesus ask His disciples about His identity. First, He asks them who people say He is. The disciples reply that some say John the Baptist or one of the prophets (see Matthew 16:14). He then says, "But who do *you* say that I am?" (Mt. 16:15, emphasis added). Simon Peter replies that He is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16). Jesus says that Peter is correct, but that it was the Father in heaven who revealed this to him.

At the beginning of the Gospel today, Jesus says He must go to Jerusalem to "suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised" (Mt. 16:21). While it may seem Jesus goes into a non-sequitur, it actually flows organically. As Bishop Sheen has commented, we know who people say Jesus is (a prophet), and we know who the Father says He is (the Messiah), but shouldn't we know who Jesus says He is? Jesus answers His own question: He is the Suffering Servant, the Priest-Victim.

This is not the type of Messiah that Simon Peter wanted, however. Peter immediately rebukes Jesus... and for that, Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mt. 16:22-23). Peter could not understand the need for the Cross.

We can be like Peter, too. Wouldn't we rather not have to take up our crosses to follow Christ? Wouldn't we rather have the light and easy burden? Certainly, our culture makes us more adept at following the easy path. Can you imagine the time before smart phones and Amazon Prime? In so many ways, we now have things quick and easy, at our virtual fingertips. And with that, comes the illusion that we are entitled to an easy, comfortable life. We don't want to have to suffer.

But, in the immortal words of the Man in Black, "Life is pain, Highness; anyone who says differently is selling something" (*The Princess Bride*). Everybody has to suffer. It doesn't matter – young or old, rich or poor, suffering will come to us in one form or another. Even if we surround ourselves with comforts and pleasure, we will eventually run up to the existential loneliness in our hearts. Many try to dull or escape that suffering with various substances, video games, or in some other manner, but in the end that will only heighten the loneliness and emptiness.

Jesus shows us that how we react to our suffering matters. If we do it like Him, we will find meaning in the suffering, and so the suffering be endurable. And how does Jesus react to His suffering? *He embraces it out of love*. Love is what makes the burden easy and light, for love is always focused outward on the other, not inward on the self. When we embrace our suffering and (as the old saying goes) offer it up for some purpose, we find that, while suffering is not enjoyable, it is bearable. Offering our suffering with Jesus' becomes redemptive – we share in the redemptive work of Jesus as we invite the grace poured out on the Cross to pour out into the world through us! Viktor Frankl discovered this while he was in the concentration camps of World War II – if you have a "why" you can endure any "what" – if you can find purpose, meaning in suffering, you can endure. Jesus' purpose and meaning in suffering was in order to save those He loves – all of us! If we can become like Him – join Him as suffering servants, as priest-victims, we won't reject the only way to the resurrection of life: through the Cross!

May we have the wisdom we need to see how we can find meaning in our crosses, and the courage to embrace them out of love for God, others and ourselves.