

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jul 14th 2014

Today's reading from Matthew includes the very familiar warning from Jesus, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." Having returned from a Holy Land pilgrimage about 3½ weeks ago, Jesus words have a new context to me. During the pilgrimage, our group made the Way of the Cross through the crowded and bustling passageways in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem. Groups of six or seven of us took turns carrying a large wooden cross for a couple of the stations. Though the prayers we said were familiar, this was a whole different way of experiencing the Stations of the Cross. We passed by shops and street vendors, who probably witness this on a daily basis, but it was uniquely poignant and inspirational for those of us who were participating. Although, we did not carry the cross alone and it was not as big or heavy as the original one, there was an element of reality to it all. We ended the stations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus' crucifixion and entombment are commemorated. Each time I pray the stations in the future, my memories of that experience will be rekindled and intensify the meaning of the prayers.

What is Jesus telling us when he tells us to take up our cross and follow him? He does not mean it literally nor does he expect us to go looking for crosses to bear. There are plenty that come our way as a part of life, some small and others that wound us to the core. He wants us to carry our crosses as he carried his, keeping in mind that he asked his father to "take this cup away" but ultimately accepted his Father's will. We also can ask the Father for relief from suffering for ourselves and for others while being open to his will. As Jesus struggled with carrying the cross, he fell under its weight three times and understands that at times our burdens will be too much for us also. His mother was there to strengthen him with her love and compassion; so also can we derive strength from the love of friends and family. He needed and accepted assistance from Simon of Cyrene and the comfort offered by the women of Jerusalem and Veronica. For some of us it may be difficult to accept help and comfort from others especially strangers, but Jesus shows us the way. It is not just his example of suffering that he offers us, but he also shows us how to accept the love, assistance and comfort offered by others so that we might be worthy of him.

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