

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 14th 2013

How we choose to observe Lent, seemingly a rather undramatic and personal matter, is actually of crucial importance not only for ourselves, but for everyone. It is important, I believe, that we take some time to examine our lives, noticing where lies our resistance to the call of Christ, and doing something, however insignificant, to break down any barriers we have placed in the way of Christ's desire to serve others in and through us. What exactly this will be is completely up to each one of us, but this, at least, can be said: it will move us away from what is self-serving, narrow, biased, and comfortable toward a life of compassion, concern, help, and dedication to others.

What does "losing our lives for the sake of Christ" really mean? How do we put such a command into practice? Each of us has to figure this out in the light of our faith, which is both a gift and a choice, a power and a commitment. This much we know for sure: we cannot remain where we are; we are always on the way, walking resolutely with Jesus toward Jerusalem. For us, it is the New Jerusalem, and so we walk with confidence and hope, knowing that Jesus both walks with us and goes before us. But it is still the way of the cross, summoning us out of our tiny, narrow, self-centered world into the much larger arena of salvation -- involving the whole human race, life for all, the life that is heavenly in its origin and its destination. We are called to die to what is secure and familiar. We are called to die to what is narrow and selfish. We are called to die to the tiny, false life of self preoccupation and self preservation.

The law of the cross is the royal road to a new and greater life -- which is joy and salvation for ourselves, who are only fulfilled by total love, and which is fuller life, greater justice, heavenly peace for all. Truly, when we respond to the summons to choose true life, we enter into the joy that no one can ever take away from us! "See how the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has become the tree of everlasting life!"

Bert Thelen, S.J.