



I begin Lent every year by reading the scripture passage, Matthew 16:21-27. In this passage, there is a stark difference from what we've seen previously in the relationship between Peter and Jesus. Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah one day and then Peter takes Jesus aside and tells him what to do. Jesus refers to Peter as the rock on which the church will be built but later, Peter is rebuked by Jesus as He refers to Peter as a tempter and tells him to get behind him. Why the sudden mood change? It has everything to do with the reality of the cross which is the very message that we need to focus on during this Holy Season of Lent.

As we journey through Lent, Jesus confronting the disciples with the reality of the cross is a good message. The cross is one of the most challenging aspects of our Christian faith and as with the disciples, we do not like to be confronted by it.

First of all, the cross shows us the seriousness of sin. Sin is a reality. It is as real as the wood of the cross. Sin and the effects of sin can infect us, make us sick and distort our vision and lead us down a dark path. The cross teaches us that sin damages everything it touches. Only the cross of Christ is the antidote to sin.

Secondly, the cross teaches us that true love is sacrificial. The cross is the sign that true love is sacrificial. During Lent, we pray at the stations of the cross the beautiful prayer: "Lord by your cross and resurrection you have redeemed the world." Love is not just a feeling or fleeting emotion despite the very different message from social media, music lyrics or movies. Instead, the cross shows us that love is about much more. It is about what we give, not about what we get or what we feel.

Finally, the cross teaches us the truth about our discipleship. To follow Christ is to follow him not despite of the crosses in our life, but through those crosses, we find life in Him. Christ tells the disciples that the cross is the only way to a deeper life. We are called to imitate Jesus by dying to ourselves, so that we can live for others and for God. To look at a crucifix often and to contemplate the Lord's love for us, is a very good thing, however, we must also confront the cross in our own lives. Every individual has their cross to bear. We can try to hide from it, rebel against it, deny it, curse it, and we can even try to numb ourselves to the reality of the cross in our lives with alcohol or with drugs. We can also choose to confront our cross with support, as Jesus invites us to and take it up. With the Lord's help we can take it up, and follow Jesus, knowing that it is through the cross that we will find life.

Lent is a time to confront the cross of Christ. Today in its very real forms, we are led to see the ways that we crucify and are crucified; To see the harm we do to the planet and to others by our actions and by our inaction. Lent is a time to confront the cross, because the only way beyond it is through it.

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