

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Jeremiah 20:7–9
Romans 12:1–2
Matthew 16:21–27

MONDAY

Mark 6:17–29
"... Herod feared John, knowing that he was a . . . holy man . . ."

TUESDAY

Luke 4:31–37
"Be silent, and come out of him!"

WEDNESDAY

Luke 4:38–44
"I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God . . ."

THURSDAY

Luke 5:1–11
"... from now on you will be catching people."

FRIDAY

Luke 5:33–39
"You cannot make wedding guests fast . . ."

SATURDAY

Luke 6:1–5
"The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

The Cross and the Culture

Today's Gospel calls us to a deeper level of spirituality. It leads us into a sense of heightened consciousness, that is, it offers us the choice to become fully awake to God's actions in our lives.

In Jesus' rebuke of Peter, he gives his disciples and us a new perspective on what it means to follow him. Imagine yourself standing among Jesus' followers and hearing these words: "Deny your very self, take up your cross, and follow me." These words followed upon the startling revelation that Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem with the full knowledge that he would suffer greatly, be killed and be raised up. Would you, like Peter, be inclined to question whether this made any sense?

It is only in relationship with the God of unconditional love and mercy that we can begin to hear these words and accept them. This is not a message that urges us to earn God's love in order to become worthy of it. We are already loved and the Divine dwells within us.

This is not a message of self-hate or masochism. After all, when we were created, God declared our innate goodness. Rather, it is a message that directs us as we travel our spiritual journey.

Paul puts it plainly "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).



The Faith of the Church

In the Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope John Paul II deals with the human condition of suffering. Suffering yields to interior maturity and spiritual growth as a result of conversion through the grace of Christ. Christ acts at the center of human suffering through the consolation of the Spirit. The very substance of the spiritual life is transformed by Christ who made suffering the firm foundation of our salvation (SD #26).



Questions of the Week

As painful as it was, Jesus was not to be dissuaded from his call. The glory of the resurrection had to pass through the suffering and humiliation of the cross. As we pass through our own anguish, we eventually rise again and discover new truths about our divine call.

Adults

What have I discovered through my own crosses?

Children

For what difficulty or cross will I ask God's help?

Responding to God's Word . . .

Growth in holiness means denying self, taking up the crosses of life and following Jesus. But today's culture preaches the values of self-indulgence, pleasure, comfort and instant gratification. Discipleship and spiritual growth constitutes a real, and often difficult, inversion of society's values.

Trust is needed to take up our crosses. Suffering is very real in the human condition; we might be tempted to avoid it at a cost to our growth or the well-being of others. Yet, as crosses enter our life journey, we can trust that if we unite our pain to that of Jesus, we will rise above it all in the end.

Suffering might be a result of crises we encounter or the struggle with our own faults. Yet through our struggles we are transformed. We are in relationship with the One who was pierced and we are forever changed by that encounter.

Finally, the disciple is challenged to follow Jesus. To follow is to grow out of our self-centered life into a life lived for others. Jesus encountered the poor, the marginalized, and the outcasts of his culture. Can we walk this same walk? To go against the culture is to gain the whole world.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. As you look in the mirror each morning, ask yourself: *Who does God want me to become this day?*

In the workplace or in school. Take note of the times you take on a superior attitude or a self-serving stance with your coworkers or classmates.

In the community. Resolve to follow Jesus' way in your encounters with neighbors, store clerks and those who serve your needs in small unnoticed ways.



Meditation Moment

A woods surrounds a retreat house in Barrington, Illinois. Tucked away among the trees is a life-sized stone crucifix. It is especially striking at night, because it is floodlighted dramatically. It is even more striking on rainy nights, because then water trickles down the face and the body of Jesus. One rainy night a retreatant came upon the crucifix and was deeply moved. Going up to it and touching it, the retreatant prayed for a long time. Later, the retreatant said, "I touched only the cross because I wasn't worthy to touch the body of Jesus."

For reflection . . .

The retreatant's story invites me to ask: Why did Jesus die as he did?

THE CROSS IS A SIGN, AN INVITATION, AND A REVELATION: A SIGN OF JESUS' LOVE, AN INVITATION TO LOVE AS JESUS LOVED, A REVELATION THAT LOVE ENTAILS SUFFERING.

FROM *VISION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

Sustain Me, Lord

My soul thirsts for you, living God. I long to follow the journey of Jesus and grow spiritually. Yet, I am distracted from that desire by the claims of the world that give me a false sense of who I am and why I was created. Keep me on track through your Word. Sustain me when the crosses of life seem to crush me. Guide me to live in the shadow of your wings. Teach me that seeking your will leads to unending joy and glory.
Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . .

Romans 12:2

Profile in Faith

Saint Peter the Apostle

mirrors our own faith and folly. His attempts to glean the favor of Jesus led to many impulsive reactions. Yet, his sincerity and trust in the Lord is evident. He grew into discipleship similar to our own ups and downs. As we try to follow Jesus, Peter is a source of consolation.

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