

**May the Lord give you peace!**

**Brothers and sisters,**

**Our reflection is on Discipleship – The Way of the Cross**

- Lent is a grace filled time for us to **deepen our response** to the Lord's call to be his disciples.
- As Franciscans particularly we seek to do this by **clearing away the clutter** that has built up in our lives, our attitudes, our attachments, our anxieties, our sinful habits
- To become simple so that we may hear and see more clearly what Our Lord is calling us to be and to do.
- For our reflection on Discipleship let us go directly to the words of Jesus to see how He defines what it means to be His disciple.
- Let us pray ...

<sup>18</sup> Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" <sup>19</sup> And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." <sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9: 18 – 26

### **Introduction**

- In this passage we see the entirety of what it means to be a disciple
- Which means we see the entirety of the Christian spiritual life.
- First we recognize who Jesus is and then we turn our life over to Him

- But what does it mean:
  - To save my life I lose it, but to lose my life for Jesus is to save it
- I'd like to suggest one way to help us understand and apply this to our lives in a practical way
- By taking the very heart of this passage and turning it into a prayer.
- Here's the heart:
  - And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
- We know prayer does not change God, but prayer changes us, it transforms us
- So by praying this passage, we are asking Him to transform us into what He means to be His disciple.
- Taking His own words and letting Him use them to transform us into what He is making known to us
- How do we pray it?
- Jesus is telling us to do something in 4 specific steps:
  - Deny yourself
  - Pick up your cross
  - Daily
  - Follow Me
- Each step leads into the other and should be taken in order
- Let's consider what each step means and how each leads to the next in the prayer process

### **First Step -- Deny Yourself**

- What would you expect most people think this means?
  - Practice penance and sacrifice, fast, hold your tongue etc.
- Wrong – Why?
  - The first step in Discipleship never starts with a focus on “me”
  - Discipleship always starts with a focus on Jesus.
- To deny yourself means to take yourself off the throne and put God there
- God is God and I am not. He is in charge not me
- All things are under His providence and will not mine
- It means we stop focusing on our demands and expectations and rather start with What does Jesus want?
- We seek first His will in all things
  - Psalm 40
    - <sup>6</sup> Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear.

Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.  
7 Then I said, "Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.  
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart."  
Psalm 40: 6-8

- I accept who He is and who I am
- His is the power and He is good
- I accept His lordship over my life.
  
- This is the first step and it is absolutely necessary for us to stop and in prayer acknowledge this and ask the Holy Spirit to refocus us on this before anything else. Otherwise, we will not be walking as His disciples
  
- Only when we are seeking His will and recognize
  - His authority and power
  - and His goodness and love,
  - can we take the next step

### **Second Step = Take up your cross**

- First thing to notice here is that He says Pick it up – its' already there
- You don't have to go about creating your own cross
  - Once you really recognize and surrender to Jesus as Lord you can accept the daily trials of your life as coming from His hand.
  - Accept what He has given
  - He has carefully and lovingly fashioned your cross for your salvation and the good of others.
  
- What are the trial of your life?
  - Age / anxiety / sickness
- Rule 10
  - United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed His will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to Him even in difficulties and persecutions.
- Discipleship will involve self-denial and suffering, and it will involve us giving up our life on a cross
- But remember Christ took the Cross and turned it into something else from an instrument of torture and death.

- What does the cross of Christ represent? -- Love unto death.
- By accepting the cross in all things, we are accepting the call to be transformed in love.
- Romans 12:
  - I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> 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: 1 – 2

### **Third Step -- Daily**

- Only in Luke, but so important to me – do this every day!
- Concentrate on what is given to do today – each day is a renewal of our commitment a gift from God to start again.
- Do not drag the regrets and failures of the past into the present moment. Do not pull-down anxieties from the future into your heart and mind
  - My past to your mercy O Lord, My future to Your providence, my present to Your love. Padre Pio
- This means discipleship is a path of on-going daily conversion –
- Rule 7:
  - United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance” and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls “conversion.” Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.
- It also means our trials and sufferings will only last for as long as the Lord permits for my good and the good of others and not a second longer.
- After we have accepted what the Lord has given today -- Get your mind out of the past and future – God is always in the NOW
- Psalm 95:
  - O that today you would listen to his voice!
  - <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts,
  - Psalm 95: 7- 8

### **Fourth Step == Follow Me**

- Expect He is going to lead you – trust Him He is mercy and goodness itself.
- Stay in the presence of God through the day constantly renewing your commitment to Him and asking Him to lead you.

- Know also -- There is nothing you have suffered or could ever suffer that He did not already bear for you. He goes ahead and calls you to ...follow Me!
- 1 Peter 2:
  - <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.  
1 Peter 2:21
- Beautiful Homily by St. Bede on the Call of St. Matthew to Follow Christ:

"By 'follow' he meant not so much the movement of feet as of the heart, the carrying out of away of life.

For one who says that he lives in Christ ought himself to walk just as he walked, not to aim at earthly things, not to pursue perishable gains, but to flee base praise, to embrace willingly the contempt of all that is worldly for the sake of heavenly glory, to do good to all, to inflict injuries upon no one in bitterness, to suffer patiently those injuries that come to oneself, to ask God's forgiveness for those who oppress, never to seek one's own glory but always God's, and to uphold whatever helps one love heavenly things. This is what is meant by following Christ."

Homily of St. Bede on the Call of St. Matthew

- Let's us always remember where are we following Christ to? The place of our resurrection!
  - Not just at the end of our lives but every day of discipleship is a day of transformation and renewal.
- 2 Corinthians 4:11
  - For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.
- Let us also remember what St. Catherine of Siena said: All the way to Heaven is Heaven because Jesus said I am the way.

### **Conclusion**

Let us conclude by using these 4 steps as a model for our prayer...

1. Deny
2. Accept
3. Daily
4. Follow

**Action Challenge**

I challenge you to take each of these 4 steps and pray each step in order as a morning offering for nine days.