

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
September 13, 2009

Readings: Isaiah 50:4c-9a; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35

Charitable Works

Our first reading this morning picks up right where we left off last week: ***“The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear.”*** It is from one of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passages which foreshadows Christ’s passion. The passage continues: ***“I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.”*** Jesus would not turn His back on the Father. He listened and carried out the Father’s will, not His own. He is our example of how we should follow God’s ways and not simply the ways that make sense to us and our society. Jesus says to Peter: ***“You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”***

Doesn’t that apply to all of us? It is often hard to understand what God wants us to do. In the stillness of our hearts, we sometimes hear Him tells us what we should do, but we ignore the call because it doesn’t make sense to us; we can’t comprehend and understand it. We can’t think as God does. So it’s best to leave the plan to Him and follow, even when we don’t understand it.

We are to deny ourselves and follow Christ as Jesus tells us in the gospel: ***“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.”***

We are called to lose our lives for the gospel, but what does this mean? As I sat down at my computer on Friday morning to prepare this homily I was greeted with the headline: “Pro-life activist shot in front of school.” I went to the link and found out that this fatal shooting was in Owosso, much too close to home. They didn’t immediately identify the victim, or even if it was a male or female, and many faces flashed through my mind of pro-life activists that I know. It turns out that I didn’t know the victim, Jim Poullion, but maybe some of you do. He lost his life for the gospel.

We are also called, maybe in much less dramatic ways, to lose our lives for the gospel each and every day. We do this by denying our sinful desires, but we also do so by reaching out in charity; by putting other people’s needs ahead of our wants; not looking out for ourselves, number one, as society tells us to do. The gospel message is geared more toward the *thou shalls* than the *thou shall nots*. We need to avoid the sins of commission, when we do something that is wrong, but we also need to avoid the sins of omission, when we fail to do what is right. As St. James instructs us, we need to do good works.

None of us would steal from or cheat the poor, elderly, or disadvantaged. We shake our heads when we see reports on the news about those that do. We can’t understand how people can be so cruel. But how often are we guilty of being cruel just by sitting back and doing nothing? Are we prone to act in the way that St. James questioned when he said: ***“If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the***

necessities of the body, what good is it?"

What good is it, indeed. We need to reflect on our willingness to do good works, not just offer sympathy and empathy. We need to be willing to make sacrifices for others; to put other's needs before our wants. This is how we lose our lives for the sake of the gospel. This is how we die a little bit each day. Let God open your ears so that you may hear His will; so that you may hear the cry of the poor and respond generously with works of charity.

Deacon Joe Hulway