

Why in the world would Jesus sternly order his disciples not to tell anyone about him? Well, Jesus had a reason, a good one. There was among the population a general expectation that the coming messiah would be a political saviour, a conquering hero who would send the Romans packing. If people were to see Jesus as the messiah in this political sense, they would have completely misunderstood Jesus. Jesus had no intention of becoming a political messiah. He would still be the messiah, but in a way that would fulfill the divine purpose, not a human one. Being the messiah will involve Jesus in suffering and death, death in the most terrible way conceivable, death by Roman crucifixion.

This prediction of his death was so unexpected. Peter, who had so brilliantly declared that Jesus was the messiah, now finds himself “rebuking” Jesus, insisting that this should not happen to him. The reaction of Jesus is both swift and brutal: “Get behind me Satan.” Peter is an angel one moment and a devil the next!

Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples for his approaching suffering and death upon the cross. Jesus did not seek suffering for its own sake, but he would not run from it if it stood in the way of achieving a greater good. That greater good was our salvation. Furthermore, he wanted to make it clear to them that one condition to being his disciples was the willingness to take up one’s cross and follow him.

He told them and us too, “He who seeks to save his life will lose it.” Now what did he mean by that? He must have meant that if you want to save your life by playing it safe, you could still lose your life. Worse still, as one translation puts it, you could lose your soul which, I think, would be an infinitely greater loss.

Why is there suffering? This question has exercised the greatest minds throughout history. It remains an unfathomable mystery. Early Christians not only asked the question, “Why is there suffering?” They adopted strategies to address it. They asked themselves, “What would Jesus do?” Now Jesus did not blame people for their sufferings. He sought to ameliorate human suffering wherever he encountered it. He healed tormented minds. He restored withered limbs. He provided food for hungry stomachs and inquiring minds. He showed mercy to sinners. Jesus responded to the needs of the poor and hungry, not merely with words of comfort but in very concrete gestures. These early Christians grasped that it was not enough to say that they believed in Jesus. They began to understand that “faith, by itself, if it has no good works, is dead.” It was not enough to believe in Jesus. They had to be like Jesus. Jesus is the revealer of divine love.

One might imagine that God could have saved us by a mere word, such as was spoken at the beginning of creation. And you would be right. That would have been sufficient to save us, but it would not have been sufficient for love. Love has a sacrificial character.

The great paradigm of love is the love that was manifested on a cross long ago. "In the pierced Heart of the Crucified, God's own heart is opened up; here we see who God is and what he is like. Heaven is no longer locked up. God has stepped out of his hiddenness" [Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 48].

It was not the sufferings of Jesus that saved us. It was the love with which he embraced his sufferings that has brought about our salvation. We are saved by love. "God offers us nothing but love, whether we accept it or not" [Father Bede McGregor, *Allocutio*, 13 August, 2018]. The monk Jacques Philippe tells us, "Only an excess of love can save the world" [Eight Doors to the Kingdom, p.114]. The Irish lay Catholic, Frank Duff, writes, "Infinite patience and sweetness must be lavished on a priceless soul" [Frank Duff, *Legio Mariae*, Chapter 39, section 2]. When it comes to love, God holds nothing back. "God is love" [1Jn 4, 8].

In his Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes, "I live now by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me" [Gal. 2, 20]. The more we awaken to the great depths of the love of Christ for us, the more his spirit will inspire and empower us to perform the deeds of love.

Christians in our part of the world may not suffer deep persecution or have to pay the ultimate price for our allegiance to Christ. But many Christians in other parts of the world do. The past 100 years has been the age of martyrs, millions of them giving their life for Christ, many of them their names forgotten and now known only by God. But we too are called to make some sacrifices now and again, perhaps some gesture of self-denial of some legitimate pleasure, or giving up some of our time for a work of community service, or using some of our energy, imagination and love for a good cause that benefits others, or taking a moment to say a prayer for someone, or by getting up in the middle of the night to attend to a sick child or by exercising patience in a very, very difficult situation or in a million other ways.

Love has a sacrificial character. Love always exacts some price, but whatever is done with love is never lost. Love is never wasted. The Carmelite St. John of the Cross wrote, "In the evening of life, we shall be judged on love."

As we come together around the altar this morning we are drawn into a great mystery. It is called the Sacrifice of the Mass. We unite our hearts and minds to the heart and mind of Christ who offers himself to the heavenly Father in one great sacrifice of love. In doing so we are manifesting our willingness to take up our cross and follow Jesus. This great offering of ourselves together with Jesus is more than matched by the offering of the heavenly Father who in turn gives us the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. He gives us

the bread that is Jesus. Jesus alone can sustain us in all earthly trials and sufferings as we journey with him into the glory of eternal life.

Dear friends, do you have the desire to become an agent of Divine Love? If you do, let Jesus love you and he will transform you into another Christ!

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