



Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
February 16, 2020

St. Maximilian's Choices

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Saint Maximilian Kolbe died in 1941 taking the place of another prisoner in Auschwitz, but his martyrdom started many years before. The boy born Rajmund Kolbe in 1894 was quite a handful—so much so that at one point his mother cried out, “What will become of you?” Shaken by his mother’s grief, Rajmund went to the town church to ask our Lady what would become of him. He wrote that the Virgin Mother appeared to him holding two crowns: one white and one red. The white crown meant he

would remain pure, and the red meant he would be a martyr. Our Lady asked the child which one he would like. He chose them both. Given the religious name Maximilian as a novice, the man who offered his own life at a concentration camp so a man with a wife and children could live would be called “a martyr of charity” by the Pope who canonized him, St. John Paul II.

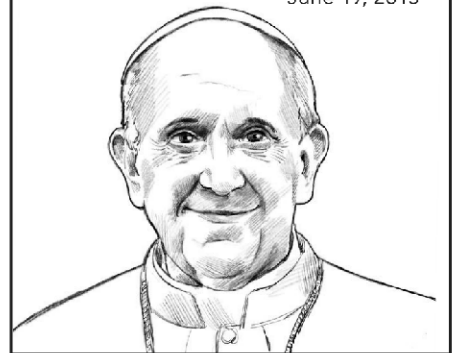
We are offered choices as well. Sirach says that whatever we choose will be given to us, but what Jesus offers is challenging. Jesus offers each of us a new heart, a new spirit, a new love, and a new trust. Jesus defines what it means to be his follower, and it is a challenging task. This standard is not lowered for Christians, nor is it defined by what is legal in a country or popular in a social group. In fact, we are not only asked to live this life but we are called to teach it to others.

The rewards, however, are equal to the challenge. What Christ promises to those who love and teach his gospel is a glory and reward greater than any we have ever seen, heard, or imagined. Maximilian Kolbe knew this, and he fought earnestly for the truth in Nazi Germany, even though it led to his arrest and death. +

A Word from Pope Francis

We must ensure that in the usual activities of every Christian community, in parishes, in associations and movements, there actually be at heart the personal encounter with Christ who communicates himself to us in his word, because, as St. Jerome teaches us, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

—Address to Catholic Biblical Federation, June 19, 2015



Sunday Readings

Sirach 15:15–20

Before everyone are life and death, whichever they choose will be given them.

1 Corinthians 2:6–10

But as it is written: “What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard... what God has prepared for those who love him”

Matthew 5:17–37 or 5:20–22a, 27–28, 33–34a, 37

[Jesus said,] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What choices did Jesus place before me this week?
- How have I been an example of Christ to others this week?

The Meaning of Winning and Losing for Jesus

By F. William H. Shannon

Jesus said, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). What is this topsy-turvy world Jesus is talking about, this world in which saving means losing and losing means saving? It sounds like telling the Yankees, “If you win a game, you lose; and if you lose a game, you win.” Say that to a baseball fan in the Bronx and see how far you get! What do Jesus’ words really mean?

Well, for starters, note that Jesus is not making the simple equation: save = lose, and lose = save. He is talking about losing one’s life for the sake of Jesus. This would have made perfectly good sense to the early Church martyrs (like Sts. Stephen, Agnes, and others), as it would for modern martyrs (Archbishop Óscar Romero, Jean Donovan, and others). All gave their lives in witness to their faith. For them, losing their mortal lives for Jesus’ sake meant achieving immortal life with him forever.

What does losing our lives for the sake of Jesus mean for us everyday Catholics who are not called upon to witness to our faith with bloodshed?

Taking on New Life

What does it mean for us to lose our lives in order to save our lives? First we

need to realize that the life we lose is not the same as the life we save. Saint Paul tells us that in Christ we become a new creation. We take on a new life in Christ.

Years ago, a low-budget movie,

Jesus of Montreal, was made in Canada. It is about the restaging of a passion play by a group of underemployed actors. In the show, an actor named Daniel takes the part of Jesus. At first he appears to be simply playing a role, but as the play progresses the role begins to turn real. He becomes increasingly



identified with Jesus in his daily life.

On one occasion he goes into a studio where a sleazy commercial that demeans women is being made. He protests against it. When the producers try to eject him, he overturns their lights in a rage and walks out. The scene is clearly reminiscent of Jesus and the moneychangers in the temple.

This may be seen as a metaphor of our stories. We put on Christ in baptism. But that is only the beginning. At first it’s as if we are play-acting: doing Christian things without the full realization of who we have become. We have to grow into Christ in all aspects of our lives—and that takes time. The Apostle Paul writes: “We should grow in every way into him who is the head [of the body], Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

The Price of Discipleship

All this sounds fine until we read Luke 14:27: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Reflecting on it jolts us to the core. It tells us that to grow into Christ, to become his disciples, we have to pay a price. Discipleship may bring joy, peace, and a sense of being grounded in Christ. But it inevitably brings the cross, too. Carrying our own cross will surely be part of our lives if we truly want to follow in the footsteps of a crucified Jesus.

The Scriptures make clear that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer. And Jesus makes clear that suffering applies to his disciples as well as to himself. The invitation to be a disciple is a great but costly grace. And it is an invitation. Jesus always respects our freedom.

Each of us needs only to look into our own lives to find our crosses. We can resent or embrace them. Embracing is the mark of a true disciple. +



Lord, you reveal the mercy of God in the world. Forgive me for the times I’ve hurt others out of anger and resentment.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 17–22

Monday, Weekday:
Jas 1:1–11 / Mk 8:11–13


Tuesday, Weekday:
Jas 1:12–18 / Mk 8:14–21

Wednesday, Weekday:
Jas 1:19–27 / Mk 8:22–26

Thursday, Weekday:
Jas 2:1–9 / Mk 8:27–33

Friday, Weekday:
Jas 2:14–24, 26 / Mk 8:34–9:1

Saturday, Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

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