

[Readings: [Isaiah 50:4c-9a; Ps. 116; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35]

As I was praying over the readings for this Sunday, preparing my homily, I had a hard time reconciling the refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm 116: "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." Shouldn't Jesus be leading me into eternity as the Good Shepherd? Then I thought in my creative imagination that one day, God willing, Jesus, always the Gentleman, would be standing at the Pearly Gates in Heaven, open wide, sweep His arm towards me and say, "After you, Nick!"

How providential that on this 20th anniversary of 9/11, we should have as the punchline of today's Gospel these words of Jesus: "For whoever wishes to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it." We remember the victims of 9/11 who lost their lives – those who died that day, those who died later as a result of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and those who died from respiratory diseases after inhaling that gray debris smoke following the building collapses.

There has been a meme going around social media that says something like, "I want to go back to 9/12/2001." It isn't a call to reopen the wounds that were so fresh on the day after the unimaginable terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C. and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Instead, it is a reminder of how our nation came together -- to weep, to mourn, to pray. Knowing nowhere else to turn, our churches were filled with people seeking God's consolation. And for a time, our neighborhoods seemed like close communities once again. We were united by the tragedy. It was a terrible time, but one made a bit more bearable by our togetherness.

Twenty years later, many feel that we are hopelessly divided -- exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In the wake of 9/11, when it felt that the world had been shaken to its core, the U.S. bishops issued a pastoral letter that called Catholics back to the basics. They encouraged prayer, weekly fasting and an understanding of what the Church teaches and why.

They invited the faithful to engage in dialogue with those who are different from them, and to witness to the Church's teaching on the dignity of all human life, justice and peace. More than anything, the bishops called Catholics back 'to God and to one another in hope,' adding that 'hope assures us that, with God's grace, we will see our way through what now seems such a daunting challenge.'

This is the message we need to hear today, too. Rather than giving into the discord that is running rampant in society, Catholics must return to the basics: prayer, fasting, love of neighbor, dialogue, the truth of Church teaching." We, like St. James, can show the faith which is the foundation of the "works" we do for ourselves, for others, for the Church, for the larger community.

The reason why we grow in faith as a Catholic Christian community is not only in the worship we give God here every week, but also in the work we do with our head, our hearts and our hands. Any responsible Christian steward who has sacrificed their time and talent for St. Martin's has grown spiritually from the experience.

Every one of us has a special gift, a special talent, or even several gifts and talents which we cannot keep hidden under a bushel barrel. We are invited, called and challenged to share those gifts with the community. We do this first as an expression of gratitude to God, Who cannot be outdone in generosity. We do this secondly, to show our personal value and worth as a baptized believer who puts their faith into action.

Finally, we do this as a witness to others in the community who may be struggling with their own identity, with their own faith, with their own search for meaning in life. And, may I also add that we honor those who have died on September 11th, by living lives of ministry and service to others. We honor the heroes of 9/11 by becoming the spiritual heroes of our Catholic faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus Christ asks you and me one of the most important questions we will ever face: "Who do YOU say that I am?" Who IS Jesus Christ for you?

Fr. Ed Beck is a Passionist priest who coordinated the weekly televised Sunday Mass out of New York. He is a handsome man, with prematurely white

hair, and steel gray-blue eyes. One day, while travelling the subway from his office to his parish, a stranger kept staring at him and then finally approached him. He shouted, "You're HIM! You're HIM!"

The stranger frantically searched for a pen and paper and said, "I need your autograph, man!" Fr. Beck, not accustomed to this attention replied, "Well, I don't usually do this, but OK." He signed the small piece of paper, "Fr. Ed Beck, CP." The stranger looked at the piece of paper and said, "Fr. Ed Beck? Who's Fr. Ed Beck? I thought you were Anderson Cooper from CNN!"

The stranger did not know who Fr. Ed Beck was.

Do we know who Jesus Christ is?

So, who is Jesus Christ for YOU? What is Jesus asking you and your household to do? How is Jesus asking you and your household to respond to His invitation to take up your cross and follow Him? The question is not, "Should I serve St. Martin de Porres Parish? But rather, "HOW am I, how are we, going to serve St. Martin's? And how much are we going to serve God through our parish?

Each one of you are loved and each one of you are needed!

Say "Yes" when you are called! AMEN!