

Read

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6,
8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

LIVING THE WORD



Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 3, 2023



REFLECTION

Today's Gospel reading from Matthew immediately follows the one we read last week, where Peter recognizes Jesus as the messiah and Jesus calls him to be the foundation of the Church. But now, in today's reading, Jesus has strong words for Peter. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for the way his life will end with his suffering and death, yet they do not understand. Peter does not want to believe it; he might have been afraid of losing his friend and mentor. Maybe you have felt that way about things before—if you ignore or deny something, maybe you won't lose what you have.

But Jesus doesn't offer comfort in the face of Peter's reaction. Rather, he demonstrates his absolute commitment to his God-centered mission of working for equality, justice, and mercy. It could not be halted because of human fear or sadness. He asks his disciples to put aside their own desires in order to follow in his path. These are strong words and two thousand years later they still challenge us. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, to give our lives for the sake of the Gospel?



ACTION

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew what the right thing to do was but doing the right thing was going to be hard? It could be at home, at your job, or at school. Reflect on that situation. What choice did you end up making? Looking back, is there something you could have done differently? This week, look for small ways to do the right thing in spite of the pressure of others, like having lunch with a classmate who is bullied or looked down upon.



Check out this story of football players leading by example: www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/8579599/chy-johnson-boys



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ When have you made a sacrifice in order to follow Jesus?
- ❖ What does it look like to apply Jesus' instructions of taking up your cross to your everyday life?



September 3, 2023

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #124A

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalms 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In last week's Gospel, we heard Peter declare that Jesus is the Son of God. This week, we learn more about what that means for Jesus. Upon hearing the suffering that is awaiting Jesus, Peter cries out that Jesus should not suffer. Jesus rebukes him quickly and notes that Peter is being a barrier to what must happen. We tend to avoid suffering and at times can be so focused on it that we forget God is still with us. Jesus tells the disciples that there will be suffering in life, yet God is always with us, walking alongside us and helping us to carry our crosses. We can become stronger as we overcome our suffering and rely on God.

Q FOCUS: *Trusting in God makes us stronger.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

September 3 is the feast day of St. Gregory the Great, a Doctor of the Church. He was born in Rome in 540. Born into a wealthy and well-educated family, he was trained and educated to a high standard. Gregory was also concerned with the poor and the struggles they faced. He was elected as pope at age fifty. During his time as pope, Gregory instituted many reforms to renew the life of the Church and its liturgy, improve the behavior of clerics, and increase vocations to monasticism. Gregory was also a great theological writer, with his work continuing to have a large influence the Church in the Middle Ages.

Church Teaching Connection

"The way that leads to the Kingdom of heaven is 'hard and narrow', and Christ contrasts it to the 'wide and easy' way that 'leads to destruction'. On various occasions Christ also said that his disciples and confessors would meet with much persecution, something which—as we know—happened not only in the first centuries of the Church's life under the Roman Empire, but also came true in various historical periods and in other parts of the world, and still does even in our own time" (*Salvifici doloris*, 25).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 16:21-27

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "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 will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The stories of great athletes oftentimes focus on their accomplishments, their records, the number of awards they win, and even maybe how much money they make. Rarely are we told as quickly about their struggles, their moments of feeling distracted or defeated, or the sacrifices they or their loved ones made to help them be successful. When we hear these stories of struggle, though, we are inspired because those athletes have shared stories of how sometimes their most successful moments were the obstacles they had to overcome to get to their current status. For example, Michael Jordan, the famous basketball player for the Chicago Bulls, has noted that he has missed more basketball shots than he has made and he noted that the obstacles he faced drove him to the success he achieved.

► **What are some of the stories of athletes overcoming challenges that have inspired you?**

Our life of discipleship is an ongoing story of overcoming challenges and remaining steadfast in faith. Jesus is our primary model for this. Just because he is our savior, doesn't mean he didn't feel pain and suffering; in fact, *because* he is our Savior, he experienced the greatest of all sufferings and rose

triumphant against them. His entire life is a model for us to follow. He knew that his followers would face rejection and persecution for his sake, but he gives us comfort because he has experienced this as well and we can identify with him in these times.

► **Do you know of any Christians who have been persecuted for their faith?**

► **What are some of the challenges to their faith that teens might experience in school or in their daily activities?**

Today we hear Jesus telling the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, be killed, and rise on the third day. Peter quickly cries out that he should not have to suffer, while losing focus on the last point, that Jesus will rise. Jesus, just as quick, notes that Peter is behaving as Satan and that he needs to step aside. Peter is trying to understand but is struggling. He can't see past the suffering. This may seem like a harsh rebuke from Jesus, but that is what is really happening when we turn away from God and only trust in what we can control or figure out ourselves.

Jesus goes on to teach the disciples that whoever holds onto the easy and convenient way of our lives will lose the most precious gift we are given: our adoption as brothers and sisters in Christ. For whatever we are unwilling to sacrifice for the love of God will become those things that hold us back from having a true relationship with Jesus. Those obstacles will keep us from feeling the complete mercy, love, and joy that Jesus alludes to in our Gospel today. When we have the courage to accept the challenges that come and rely on where Jesus is leading us, we reestablish our faith in God. We know that God loves us so much that he died for us; relying on this truth will help us overcome anything so that we can continue our journey to eternal life with him. The difficulties in our lives do not define us but rather propel us for greatness in faith and oneness with Christ. Peter will learn this later in his faith journey. Jesus knows this will take time for them and, while honest, is patient with them. He shows that same care and patience with us as we go through our lives of faith.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 22.

What obstacles keep you from loving Jesus more?

When have you felt the love of God?

No struggle is stronger than Jesus' love for you.

Act on the Word

Can You Beat the Challenges?

For this activity, you will need snacks for all the teens in your group and enough Bibles and handouts (described below) for each small group.

Ask the teens to get into groups of three and give them a handout that lists the challenges that are noted below. Share with them that this isn't a race but a test of will, to see if the youth are able to get through the challenges to get the snack. The youth minister or adult volunteers should be available to check that the tasks are completed. Remind the teens that they should encourage and help one another in these tasks.

The list of challenges should include the following:

1. One person in the group has to sing, "Happy Birthday" while standing on one foot.
2. One person in the group needs to try to do a handstand or a cartwheel.
3. One person needs to do ten jumping jacks while reciting the alphabet.
4. One person needs to find a Bible verse or story that talks about forgiveness and read it to the group.
5. Each person in the group will say one word of the "Hail Mary" until the whole prayer has been prayed.

6. One person needs to go to another person in another group and find out that person's favorite meal.

7. Two people need to make up their own special hand clap or handshake and show the youth ministry leader.

8. One person needs to find out which book in the Bible talks about Jonah and the whale. This person needs to tell the name of this book to the youth ministry leader.

9. One person needs to find a person from another group with the same eye color.

10. Play a game of telephone until the last person gets the phrase correct. The person starting the game can choose the phrase.

When all the groups are finished, have the teens reflect briefly on their challenges. Which was hardest? Which challenges took the most teamwork? Which challenge did they like the best? Note that these were silly challenges to get a snack but that in life, challenges may be much harder. Remind the youth that they are strong, they have a community that supports them, and that Jesus loves them more than anyone.

Closing Prayer

*Through the passion of your Son, O God,
you have brought us salvation
and the forgiveness of sins.*

Give us the grace

to bear whatever suffering we might

encounter in this life

*so that we might enter into the eternal
peace of your kingdom.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.