

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel picks up where last Sunday's Gospel ended. Although Jesus told his disciples in last Sunday's Gospel that "*the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against*" the Church, today's Gospel begins with Jesus prophesying his passion, death, and resurrection.

Peter's reaction was immediate: "*Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, 'God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.'*" Jesus turned to Peter and said, "*'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'*"

Today's Gospel should remind those chosen for leadership in the Church, including the Pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, and diocesan and parish leaders, that they need to be humble leaders. They should not allow their roles go to their heads as Peter did, telling Jesus he knew better what should happen. Likewise, passages such as this should help us deal with humanness, limitation, and imperfection in Church leaders.

The book *Lead Like Jesus* reminds us that anyone who seeks to influence others is a leader.¹ All of us are called to remain humble whenever we are given a position of leadership or authority or whenever we seek to influence others. We always need to remember that we are called to model our leadership after Jesus's leadership, i.e., that we are called to servant leadership.

Jesus then said to his disciples, "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*" The key question is what it means to take up our cross. Taking up our cross does not mean looking for crosses to carry. Everyday life is difficult enough. We often struggle with marital, family, and/or relationship problems, financial and/or job problems, and health problems, especially as we age. I would suggest that taking up our cross and following Jesus is dealing well with what life throws at us. We just need to do our best to deal well with the life we have. As Jesus said, "*Each day has enough trouble of its own.*" [Mt. 6:34].

Jesus went on to make the point that there would be no profit for a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his life: "*What can one give in exchange for his life?*" Another translation translates the passage a little differently: "*What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process? What can a man offer in exchange for his very self?*" [NAB, 1970]. To me this latter translation is far more powerful than the lectionary translation. The more we seek ourselves, the more we seek money and possessions, power and prestige, or pleasure, the more we risk destroying ourselves. I have said it before. Never has anyone on his death bed regretted not making more money or having more possessions. What matters are relationships, especially our relationship with God and our relationships with others.

My brother and sisters, in today's reading from Romans, St. Paul offers a double challenge. First, he admonishes us not to conform ourselves to this age. This is a huge challenge because we are so heavily influenced by our culture through the media and social media. Instead of conforming ourselves to this age, he calls us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Jesus saved us by offering his life to God for us, thus conjoining love for God and love for us perfectly. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice when we love others as Jesus loves us, i.e., when our love for others is self-giving and self-sacrificing.

¹Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Times*, (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2005), p. 5.