

**Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 16, 2018**

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

**First Reading: IS 50:5-9A**

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear;  
and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.  
I gave my back to those who beat me, my  
cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face  
I did not shield from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not  
disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing  
that I shall not be put to shame. He is near who  
upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose  
me, let us appear together. Who disputes my  
right? Let that man confront me. See, the Lord  
GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong?

**Responsorial Psalm: PS 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9**

**R. (9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land  
of the living.**

I love the LORD because he has heard my voice  
in supplication, because he has inclined his ear  
to me the day I called.

**R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of  
the living.**

The cords of death encompassed me; the snares  
of the netherworld seized upon me; I fell into  
distress and sorrow, and I called upon the name  
of the LORD, "O LORD, save my life!"

**R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of  
the living.**

Gracious is the LORD and just; yes, our God is  
merciful. The LORD keeps the little ones; I was  
brought low, and he saved me.

**R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of  
the living.**

For he has freed my soul from death, my eyes  
from tears, my feet from stumbling. I shall walk  
before the Lord in the land of the living.

**R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of  
the living.**

**Second Reading: JAS 2:14-18**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters if

someone says he has faith but does not have  
works?

Can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has  
no food for the day, and one of you says to them,  
"Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, " but you  
do not give them the necessities of the body, what  
good is it?

So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is  
dead.

Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I  
have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without  
works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from  
my works.

**Gospel: MK 8:27-35**

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of  
Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his  
disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They  
said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still  
others one of the prophets." And he asked them,  
"But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him  
in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned  
them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must  
suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the  
chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and  
rise after three days. He spoke this openly.

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke  
him. At this he turned around and, looking at his  
disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind  
me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but  
as human beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and  
said to them, "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 and that of  
the gospel will save it."

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#### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

#### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

#### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

On October 19, 1984, the Polish state police stopped the car of Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko beat him to death and then threw his bound body into the Vistula River. His crime? Encouraging people to take the side of “good against evil, truth rather than falsehood, and love rather than hatred,” thus resisting the evil of the Polish Communist regime, (adapted from Witness to Hope, by George Weigel).

In this week’s Gospel reading Jesus also challenges the disciples to choose whether they will be on God’s side or not, implying that God’s side would entail the suffering, rejection and death of himself, their leader. Can we blame Peter for his response that Jesus should be spared this ordeal? Though our spirit applauds movies like Rocky and Karate Kid, when the hero, beaten and bloodied, arises from the canvas in the final round to overcome the villain’s plummeting, we do not desire this kind of victory for ourselves or the ones we love. We, like Peter, would choose for ourselves and others a life free from pain and suffering, believing that our good intentions for them are synonymous with God’s intentions for them.

Jesus on the other hand fully recognized that to fulfill God’s intentions in a world opposed to his rule, would require a life of sacrifice and a willingness not only to suffer but also to die. Consequently, Jesus spelled out precisely, that suffering, rejection and death lay ahead for many of those who would follow him. He knew that people would have to be willing to not put their comfort and well being ahead of God’s mission and will. This was the basis of his call to “come after me.”

Knowing people’s aversion to pain and suffering and our preoccupation with self-preservation, why did Jesus invite them to follow him while introducing this scenario? Equally mystifying is why the disciples said yes to Jesus’ call. This week’s Gospel sheds some light on the reasons. First, as we see in Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question, the disciples had moved from a position of simply viewing Jesus as a great teacher to one of knowing that he was in fact the Christ. When this truth grips a person’s heart and mind, as it did the disciples’ hearts, then it becomes the most important thing in the world. Once Jesus has become to us, and for us, the Christ, there is no other alternative, and he is to be followed and pursued regardless of the cost.

Second, the promise of suffering, rejection and death included the promise of rising again. Victory was assured regardless of the intensity of the battle. The only way they could lose out in the long run was to choose self-preservation in the short run. The disciples knew that eternity was at stake and were unwilling to settle for the short-term solution of peace now, in exchange for forfeiting the long term promise of peace for eternity. When our relationship with Christ and a resurrected life with him becomes so important to us that nothing else matters, we will understand and rejoice in Jesus’ statement that, “Where I am, there will be my disciples also.”

Third, the promise that “whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it” also introduces fulfillment and peace in this life. Throughout history those who have followed Jesus wholeheartedly have discovered joy, peace, contentment, and purpose in the midst of service—a quality of life they would never exchange for the riches, comfort, and security others are striving for and finding unfulfilling. Do you really want a great life, an abundant life? Try following Jesus wholeheartedly. When you look back you will discover that you choose the best.

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Christ's call is a call to martyrdom. For most of us it will be a life of martyrdom rather than a death of martyrdom, but we will need to have the same attitude as did Lorenzo Ruiz. This Philippine layman who was martyred in World War II, said, "Even if this body would have a thousand lives, I would let all of them be killed [before you would] force me to turn my back on Christ."

\* From Witness to Hope, by George Weigel.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

#### First Reading

1. In what way does Isaiah's prophesy inspire you?
2. How was God's help manifested to Isaiah?

#### Second Reading

3. What is the relationship between faith and works?

#### Gospel Reading

4. What is encompassed in the statement, "You are the Christ"?
5. Why did Jesus say that Peter's rebuke represented the side of men rather than the side of God?
6. When has it cost you to follow Christ?
7. How do you respond to Jesus' challenge in verses 34-35?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

*Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.*

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.*