

Homily of Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63:2-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

We are all carrying various kinds and sizes of crosses. That is why Jesus invites us in today's gospel, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). "Deny oneself" means to surrender one's personal plans to God and put God first. Our crosses are our afflictions, difficulties, trials, temptations, responsibilities, love of God and love of neighbor, and our faith journey.

In the first reading, Prophet Jeremiah's cross was his responsibility to prophesy to his people, their rejection of him, and the persecution he suffered in their hands.

When God called Jeremiah, he said to him, "To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you ... See, I place my words in your mouth! Today, I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:7-10).

The first reading was a time Jeremiah felt that God had not fulfilled his promises to him, "to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish." Rather, he continued to see "terror on every side" and hear "denounce him, denounce him" (Jeremiah 20:10). In his frustration, Jeremiah accused God of duping him (deceiving him). He wanted to stop prophesying. "I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." Despite how he felt, Jeremiah did not give up. He continued to prophesy. The prophesy of Jeremiah does end with chapter 20 of the first reading, it ends with chapter 52. Jeremiah teaches us to continue the work of God even when the work is not recognized, and when there is no apparent good result, and when one is not appreciated, and when one is persecuted for no just reason. That is the way to carry our crosses and follow Jesus.

St. Paul encourages us in the second reading not to embrace the standard of "If you can't beat them, join them." St. Paul encourages us, "Do not conform yourselves to this present age..." We are to remain steadfast to the will of God, to what is good and to what is pleasing to God. Not what is pleasing "to this present age." That is the way to carry our crosses and follow Jesus.

In the gospel, Jesus speaks about his own cross, that he "must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed ..." Peter wanted Jesus to refuse his cross. "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." Peter was an obstacle to the will of God, to what is good and to what is pleasing to God. Therefore, Jesus rebuked him, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me."

The encounter between Jesus and Peter reveals to us the pressure we go through in times of our crosses. Jesus teaches us not to refuse or abandon our crosses. He says, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). We need to be watchful of the pressures that come from our close ones. Peter was very close to Jesus. The most difficult trials and temptations are not from enemies. They are from close ones. Many times, we compromise/conform ourselves due to pressures from close ones against what is good, what is God's will, and what is pleasing to him. We pray for the grace to resist such pressures.

Let us conclude with this story:

God, according to his divine plan, gave a man a tall cross to carry and told him, "While on your journey, pray for anything, and I will give you." The man set off on his journey. After a few miles, he cried to God, "Lord, my cross is too heavy, please, cut it down a little." God threw a handsaw to him to cut the cross to the size he wanted. He was delighted and continued his journey. After a few more miles, he cried to God again, "Lord, please cut it down a little more, I will be able to carry it better." God threw a handsaw to him to cut the cross a little more according to his wish. He was glad. After a few more miles, he got to a gully. The easiest way he would have crossed over the gully would have been to place the cross across the gully to become a bridge. Sadly, the cross was, now, too short to go across the gully.

May our crosses become our bridges across the gullies in our life journeys. Amen.

The story of Jesus's cross ends with his resurrection. May the stories of our crosses end with testimonies of victory. Amen.

However, we know that there are incomprehensible lifelong crosses. In such conditions, we pray for enduring grace while trusting in God in whose will is our strength and peace. To God be the glory, even in incomprehensible lifelong crosses. Amen.

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