

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Wisdom 9:13–18
Philemon 1:9–10, 12–17
Luke 14:25–33

MONDAY

Luke 6:6–11
"... is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath ... ?"

TUESDAY

Luke 6:12–19
"... he called his disciples and chose twelve of them ..."

WEDNESDAY* **

Matthew 1:1–16, 18–23
"She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus ..."

THURSDAY

Luke 6:27–38
"Do not judge, and you will not be judged."

FRIDAY

Luke 6:39–42
"Can a blind person guide a blind person?"

SATURDAY

Luke 6:43–49
"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"

*Alternate readings exist for this day.

**Feast of The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Practicing the Cross

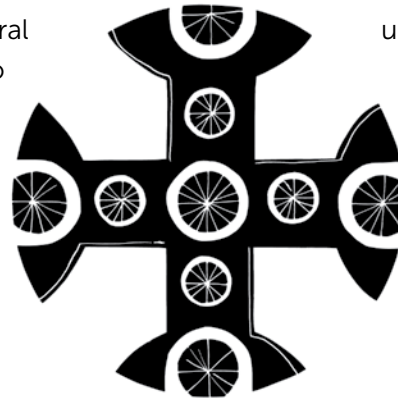
Betty was a woman in her forties with two boys in grade school and a loving husband. She had severe arthritis. Her hands were like gnarled fists. Despite her pain, she remained a thoroughly positive person. When people would ask her how she could be so happy with arthritis, she would answer, "It is the only way I can be happy. I do not have the choice of being happy without my arthritis. It is here to stay. Therefore, my only choice is to be happy with the arthritis or to be depressed with the arthritis. Several years ago, I decided to try happiness."

"I see my arthritis as a kind of discipline or practice. I try to

focus on what is good in my life rather than what is wrong. Every morning when I get up, the first thing that I feel is the pain in my hands. It cries out for all of my attention and energy. I try not to feed it. I focus on my family, my friends, and my future. Seeing goodness there gives me joy, even with the pain that is still in my hands."

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. We must, of course, obey. But, the

challenge is not simply picking up our cross, but carrying it joyfully. To do this, we must focus not on the cross but on the gifts that surround it. Keeping such a focus is difficult. It requires practice.



The Faith of the Church

The virtue of fortitude is the habit by which we have courage in difficulty and the strength to focus on what is good. Guided by this virtue, Christians are able to bear the crosses of their lives in hope and confidence, because they realize that Christ has overcome the evil of the world (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1808).



Questions of the Week

Jesus says that disciples must be prepared "to hate" (Luke 14:26) members of their families. This is strong language. It does not, however, call us to reject our families but to place God first above any other relationship.

Adults

What can I do to recall the good things in my life rather than allow my burdens to paralyze me?

Children

When I am sad or upset, what good things can I remember to give me hope?

Visit us at www.FaithFirst.com (click on "Faith First for Families," click on "Gospel Reflections") and share today's Gospel reading as a family.

Responding to God's Word . . .

We do not have a choice whether we are going to take up our crosses. We do not seek them. They just come to us. We turn a corner in our life and suddenly realize, "I am going to have to deal with sickness, divorce, rejection, or unemployment." We would all rather avoid these troubles, but we have no choice but to carry them.

However, we can choose *how* we carry them. Rather than letting them absorb all of our energy and joy, we can bear our crosses and still remain open to life and happiness.

Yes, the pain we experience is real. But so is the sunshine in the backyard, the beauty of grandchildren, and lunch with an old friend. Choosing to focus on what is good is a discipline. It is also important practice for the future, as there will be greater burdens to come.

One day we will need to grieve the loss of someone we love deeply or possibly face a sickness that will lead to our own death. When those greater burdens come, we will be able to face them with confidence and even joy if we have practiced how we carry our crosses today.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. Before dinner, allow each family member to remember a blessing that gives them joy. Then thank God together for the gifts that have been given.

In the workplace or in school. Notice someone who is carrying a heavy burden. Assure that person of your prayers and support.

In the community. Identify and support a ministry of your church that helps those who must carry a cross of grief, hardship, or poverty.



Meditation Moment

Charles Dickens, author of *The Christmas Carol*, was the highest-paid writer of his time. Yet he did not receive a single cent for the first nine stories he published. Lawrence Tibbet became a Metropolitan opera star. Yet the first time he saw the inside of the Metropolitan Opera House was in the standing-room-only section, because he couldn't afford a seat. John D. Rockefeller attained legendary proportions because of the fortune he amassed. Yet he started life hoeing potatoes at four cents an hour.

For reflection . . .

The stories of people who began with crosses to carry invite me to ask, What motivates me to pick up my cross daily and keep moving forward perseveringly?

IT IS NO DISGRACE TO START ALL OVER.

IT IS USUALLY AN OPPORTUNITY.

GEORGE MATTHEW ADAMS

FROM ACTION BY MARK LINK, SJ

A Prayer for Hope

Loving God,
it is easy for me to see
the crosses in my life. They come
as sickness, family disputes, economic
pressure, and misunderstanding.
Expand my vision. Do not allow my
crosses to dominate me. If there are
losses, there are also gifts. If there
is rejection, there is also friendship.
If there is fear, there is also love.
If there is a cross, there is also
a resurrection. Amen.

*Carry this thought in your heart
as a guide for your faith journey
this week.*

May I never boast of
anything except the cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ, by
which the world has been
crucified to me, and I to the
world. Galatians 6:14

Profile in Faith

Saint Helena

Helena was the mother of Constantine the Great. A devout follower of Jesus, she used her position and wealth to care for the poor. Late in life, she traveled to Jerusalem where she discovered an ancient cross and became convinced it was the cross of Jesus. She died in 330. Her feast day is August 18.

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