

24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME “B” - September 12, 2021

For the last two weekends we have heard Jesus in Mark’s Gospel speaking about the heart --- not, of course, the physical muscle inside our body, but what it represents & symbolizes --- the core reality of who we are as a spiritual people!

And we have also noted that as we know from our medical professionals, there are 3 basic elements that come into play when dealing with our heart health: 1. early identification of signs/symptoms, 2. making appropriate interventions to help keep things open and 3. modifying our lifestyle --- and those same things are true for the condition of our spiritual heart.

And in today’s Gospel reading we hear about that 3rd element: modifying our lifestyle and changing how we live to support healthier spiritual living! And this will not be an easy thing to do!

Just as it is not easy for someone who is participating in a cardiac rehab process to eat differently, to exercise differently and to make other modifications in their whole approach to life, it was not easy for Peter and the other disciples to modify & change their expectations about the real identity of Jesus and the kind of Messiah that he is called to be, and what that would ultimately require of them!

On the one hand, Peter “get it right” at first about who Jesus is when he says “You are the Christ” --- but when Jesus starts talking about suffering greatly, being rejected, being killed ... Peter resists and rebukes Jesus, who then responds by rebuking Peter – and challenging him to modify & change his understanding and how he plans to live his life as a spiritual person!

Here’s the 3 necessary changes that Jesus asks --- deny self, take up cross, follow him:

1. Deny self --- rather than look for what seems to comfort, satisfy
2. Take up cross --- do not just take the easy way, the path of least resistance and avoid sacrifice
3. Follow him --- which means not focusing on one’s own agenda, plans, control of things

Basically, Jesus is challenging his disciples to be willing to really change their hearts if they want to experience most fully what living the Kingdom of God is all about --- the good news, of course, is that we know that they did – and so can we (even though it may not always be easy)!

This call to modify/change how we live resonates in a very fitting way for us this weekend, as both citizens of our nation as we recall the 20th anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11 --- and as participants in the faith community of Saint Ann Church as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the dedication of our place of worship!

The story of 20 years ago, as much as it is about horrible suffering and unspeakably tragic loss, is also – and more – about the heroism and courage and self-sacrificial love of passengers, first responders and countless others that demonstrates the far greater and more enduring power of love than of terror.

The story of 50 years of worship here is about so many brothers and sisters in Christ whose generous and faith-filled lives have found --- and continue to find --- their focus here --- denying self, taking up cross, following Jesus in so many ways as “A Welcoming Catholic Community That Loves God, Forms Disciples, Serves Others, Changes Lives”!

Medical science has learned that a human heart performs well and for a long time – especially if we are attentive early to the presence of certain identifiable symptoms or “warning signs”, if we intervene and take action to address what needs attention, and if we modify & change how we think and how we live --- all of which extends not only the length but the quality of our life!

The same is true for the condition of our spiritual heart and in living the spiritual life --- as Jesus said to the crowd with his disciples: “...whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it...”!