

Twenty Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 13, 2015

Every time we look at a crucifix or gaze on a picture of Christ we can imagine the question Jesus asked his disciples written underneath: "Who do you say I am?" In our prayer and meditation we can usefully spend time pondering the answer to that question.

And when we do that, we come to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God and indeed that he is the one true Savior of the World.

If we can confess this essential truth then we can truly call ourselves Christians. But there's more to it, of course, because by confessing this fact we must also face the fact that there will follow consequences for our own lives.

The disciples weren't ready for that so they didn't understand why Jesus had to suffer and die on the Cross, which is why Peter protested.

But the strength of Jesus response, "Get behind me Satan" clearly indicates that Jesus understood that the cross was the only way that his mission could be achieved. In a sense he was also warning-off anyone who might be tempted to follow him in a light-hearted or casual way.

Jesus knew that he was going to give his life on the Cross but he also

knew that many of his listeners would end up being Martyrs for the Gospel and so he took the opportunity to warn them what they were likely to face.

But what about those of us who won't face persecution or martyrdom? That doesn't mean that we're exempt from the life of sacrifice or suffering.

So, what is this suffering that we are supposed to embrace that will allow us to become our truest and most Christian selves? Well a pretty good explanation comes from a very unexpected source.

Sigmund Freud wrote in his work *Civilization and Its Discontent*, that we're threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and cannot even do that without sending out pain and anxiety as warning signals. Suffering can come from the natural world, which can inflict us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally suffering can come from our relationships with other people.

And Freud rightfully added, as all of us have experienced at some point in our lives, this third form of suffering is perhaps more painful than any other.

So obviously, we don't need go out looking for ways to suffer. But the lesson for Peter and for each of us here today is that when we do come up against unavoidable suffering the best thing to do is to embrace it and to unite it

with what Christ suffered on the Cross of Calvary. In this way, our suffering takes on new meaning and will actually contribute not only to our personal salvation, but for the salvation of the world.

This is especially true for many of us who struggle everyday with a lack of patience towards other people or even ourselves. Because by embracing as suffering the annoyances and the faults of others, as well as our own faults, we inevitably become more patient and forgiving human beings which in turn becomes a source of blessing for us and everyone we encounter on a daily basis.

Perhaps the most important line in today's Gospel is where Jesus says to Peter, "The way you think is not God's way but man's."

One of the biggest traps that we often fall into is that we are all too often preoccupied with ourselves, with our own interests and concerns.

But God sees things completely differently; his perspective is that of eternity. And this is the perspective we need to adopt. We need to look at our sufferings, our irritations and even our desires through the lens of God's eternal perspective.

When we do this we see that our greatest concerns fade away and other values become more important: values such as patience, endurance, hope, love, forgiveness and trust. It's this living faith that St. James referred to in our second reading that will bring us joy; and it's only this living faith that will lead us to eternal life.