

Welcome, everyone, and thank you all for being here as we gather to celebrate this Eucharist.

Our first reading from the book of Isaiah is one of the passages referred to as the Suffering Servant. “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.” As disciples of Christ, we recognize that person. That is Jesus. He recognized the sins of the people and the punishment that God had brought upon them because of them, and chose to suffer in expiation for those sins. This figure of the Suffering Servant would have been very well known to the Jews of Jesus’ time, and when it says in our gospel that Jesus explained to the apostles that he would have to suffer and die and rise again after three days, it is very easy to imagine that he appealed to these passages from Isaiah in explaining to them what he was called to do.

Peter, after confessing that Jesus was the Messiah, was scandalized by this.

“Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah”, which means “Anointed One.” If you were anointed, you were someone special. Kings were anointed. Great prophets like Elijah and Elisha were anointed. Priests were anointed. So when Peter confesses that Jesus is THE Anointed One, he probably had these kinds of things in mind, great prestige and honor in the world.

But Jesus chastises Peter for thinking as the world does. Our heavenly Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Anointed One, but Peter mistook what that meant. To be the Christ does not mean worldly glory, honor and power. Rather, it means what we hear in Isaiah about the Suffering Servant. It means being chosen to suffer in order to redeem us from our sins. It means absolute fidelity to the will of the Father.

We can imagine why that would make Peter nervous. To be a Christian means we follow Christ, and in fidelity to the will of the Father, Christ went to the cross. Through humiliation, suffering, and death on the cross Jesus broke the powers of sin and death and won for us our salvation. And he calls us to follow him.

This mystery is mind boggling. The Lord suffered at our hands, and because of it, we are redeemed. We can only begin to understand this mystery through the mystery of love. Christ suffered for us because he loved us. We can only comprehend this in the context of self-emptying, self-sacrifice. A mindset that is self-centered cannot understand sacrifice, and therefore it cannot understand love. If we are only worried about our own needs, our own rights, the injustices that occur against us, even if they are legitimate; if these things consume our lives, we cannot love. It's impossible. Real love demands to be other-centered. It demands that we put aside our own wants and needs in order to meet those of another, not so

that they will return the favor, but simply because they are a child of God and we are called to love them as Christ did. In fact, the deeper the love, the greater we are willing to sacrifice.

If we are to be followers of Christ, we must love as he loved, we must take up our cross. That is what Jesus tells us. But when he says this, he is not just referring to major sacrifices like dying for our faith. We may be called to that, but probably not. No, he is also referring to the sacrifices of love that occur every day of our lives. Take the married vocation, for example. The first years of marriage may be more romantic. Before there are children, there is a greater ability to be present just for each other. Still, hopefully we recognize that as time goes on, and a married couple sacrifices more for each other, and they endure the trials that every married couple goes through, their love grows deeper. There is a better understanding of your spouse because you are willing to accept him or her more than before. There is a new depth to the love that was not possible before there was such willing sacrifice.

Another example: those of you whose lives revolve around taking care of a loved one who is sick, and the great sacrifice that entails. There is a deeper, more intimate love because of that sacrifice, one that can only come from enduring those hardships with love. That doesn't mean there aren't times of difficulty, when the

cross can seem too heavy to carry and we wish we could set it down. Of course that happens, and is nothing to be ashamed of. It does not diminish the love that is present between you. In fact, persevering through them makes the love stronger. Those taking care of ailing parents or siblings, or walking their child through a difficult illness know that the sacrifices they endure while taking care of their loved one, while challenging, are also a source of grace and consolation because they are evidence of a relationship of true love.

That is why Christ chastised Peter. Christ tells them that he loves them so much that he is going to willingly die for their sake, and Peter rebukes him for it. Christ tells him to think as God thinks, so that his eyes can be opened to the love that Christ has for him and all of us, and so that he, and all of us, can follow that example of sacrificial love. It is a great gift from God to be called to follow Christ's example and give up our lives for each other. As difficult as it can be, nothing is more fulfilling. Nothing will bring us greater happiness.

So how do we get there? On a practical level, we have to recognize that we have selfish tendencies, and fight them. There is a price to pay when we love sacrificially, and that price comes in the form of giving up our time, leaving our own desires unfulfilled so we can care for another. There is a moment when we have to choose whether or not to extend ourselves and sacrifice for another person,

and in that moment, we will feel that tug to say no and take care of ourselves. We should expect that, and we should recognize it for what it is – the temptation to listen to Peter and refuse the cross. If we have the maturity to recognize that temptation, we can choose instead to follow Christ and say yes – yes, I will sacrifice my time and my desires to help this person in front of me.

And that requires being close to Jesus. Being faithful to our daily prayers and receiving the grace of the sacraments in confession and the Eucharist will help us make the right choice and choose to love. Let us strive to live as disciples of Christ, embrace the sacrifices our Lord calls us to make, to think as God thinks, and rejoice in the opportunity to love another as our Lord loves us.