

24th Sunday OT
Mark 8:27-35

First Passion and Death Prediction

This is the first open teaching of the gospel, as opposed to teaching in parables. The Son of Man was a glorious, triumphant figure; who ever heard of a *suffering* Son of Man? Peter was scandalized and rebuked Jesus in words Jesus used in casting out a demon. Jesus in turn rebuked Peter, giving him the name of Satan, the tempter. He was thinking human thoughts, not the thoughts of God. So serious was the misunderstanding of Peter that Jesus solemnly called all the disciples to him with the crowds and announced a new requirement for all those who would come after him. They were not only to follow him and be with him; they had to ***deny themselves and take up the cross after him***. They might lose their lives for his sake and that of the gospel.

Self-denial doesn't come naturally to us. Self-satisfaction is what we crave. The human ***ego*** constantly seeks to dominate the agenda. Literally, the word "ego" means "I am" in Latin – and this expression of our existence occupies the core of our motivation unless we are aware of it and put conscious limits on it. Otherwise, it really IS "all about me."

The only way to displace the ego is to embrace ***a new center***. This is what we do in hours of adoration and worship. In these times, we allow God to hold the center of our attention and we submit our will to the divine will. In the stories of the saints, we see this common thread – that he or she spent long hours in contemplation and silence. Centering on God, to the point that there is nothing left for us to say, requires a profound self-surrender. We give up the talking so that God's voice can clearly and finally be heard.

Centering Prayer is exactly that, the practice of not only silence but centering on God...for a change. No words and no feelings allowed but plenty of silence. Sometimes a "mantra" word can be used, that is a small phrase or even just a word like Jesus is allowed. But many Christians give up because they don't see anything being accomplished. That is our problem of always being "Human Doings" rather than Human Beings! We expect progress, reward, accomplishment, and so forth. Like the today's gospel message, we need to stop thinking human thoughts, deny

ourselves, lose our lives beginning with our ego. Many religious congregations have **contemplation** as their sole mission, being silent and allowing God to speak. The best example are the Carthusians, and because of that they never had to be renewed as a congregation in their whole history of existence. A movie was produced recently called “Into the Silence” about them, located in France. Needless to say, there was no commentary nor talking nor interviews...**just silence**, except for chant at their liturgies. And yet, they have maintained their numbers.

How can we talk about God when we have never listened to God? How can we preach God’s word when we have never listened to God Holy Spirit? One way is to live among the people of God. In today’s reflection from Give Us This Day, James H. Cone writes, “The Gospel, or Good News, is found wherever poor people struggle for justice, fighting for their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

He continues, “(God is) ...a mystery that one can neither control nor fully understand. It is here and not here, revealed and hidden at the same time.” That is why silence is appropriate when we are in God’s presence, so that **our words** will not try to control what God is trying to say to us, and our thoughts are not trying to put words into God’s mouth.

And yet what makes me sit up and pay attention to Dr. Cone is the last part of this short article where he writes, “Nowhere is that paradox, that inscrutability (of God), more evident than **in the cross**. A symbol of death and defeat, God turned it into a sign of liberation and new life.”

Jesus has to publicly rebuke Peter to get the message across, that his death is not human design, but God’s. I am sure God would have it another way, but we have to trust that the path God allowed his Son to follow was the only way. Even today, how many people continue to **walk the way of the cross** – like migrants from Central America and even Afghanistan to America?

James’s letter from our second reading reminds us that our faith without works is empty. Yet action without silence before God only feeds our ego rather than serving God. We become just another health worker or Peace Core Volunteer rather than the hands and heart for God. We will eventually think ourselves saviors rather than servants of the Lord’s people.