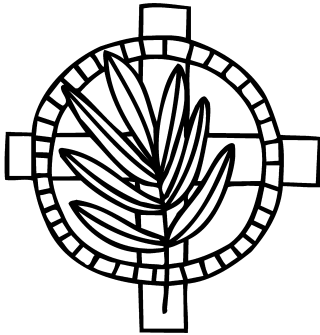


YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

# THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 11    AUGUST 28, 2011



*The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew  
the Sixteenth Chapter.*

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

***Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection***

**F**rom that time on [after Peter confessed Jesus to be the Messiah], Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." **23** he turned and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.**"

### ***The Cross and Self-Denial***

**24** Jesus told his disciples, "**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? 27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. 28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**"

*This is the Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## Sermon - August 28, 2011

## Year A - Year of Matthew - Pentecost 11

Jeremiah 15:15-21; Psalm 26:1-8; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Back at the beginning of Lent, we read the temptation account. That is the one when, after Jesus was baptized, he went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. When he was finished with the fast, he was famished. Satan came to Jesus and said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." In that narrative, the Devil continues to tempt Jesus. Finally, Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' "

What was the Devil doing in that temptation narrative? He was trying to cause Jesus to stumble from the course upon which the Father had set him. He was tempting Jesus to give up being the Messiah for a loaf of bread, a flash of glory, and worldly power. Jesus responded to each temptation; finally, he told Satan to go away.

What we have in today's Gospel is another kind of temptation narrative. Just a few lines before, Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus said that those words, which came from Peter, came as a divine revelation. They were words of faith that were like a rock upon which the Church is built.

That brings us to today's Gospel. Peter has confessed Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus now begins to explain to the disciples what it exactly means to be the Messiah. He must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed. This is the first time that Jesus speaks of his death. Peter listens, and he cannot believe what he is hearing.

Peter is confused. The Messiah was to bring the defeat of Israel's enemies and the victory of God's chosen people over all their oppressors. The Messiah was to be a powerful figure with a military answer to Israel's problems. The Messiah was not to be an unarmed teacher killed

in the most shameful, humiliating form of execution the Romans had at their disposal. Peter did not want to hear such nonsense.

Peter pulls Jesus aside and begins to scold Jesus. "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

A temptation has happened here. It is one just as significant, compelling, and dangerous as those Satan gave Jesus when he was in the wilderness.

How are Peter's words ones of temptation? Try to imagine knowing what your future holds. Try to picture it holding great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and an excruciating death on a cross. Then, someone you trust, who has just spoken a revelation from the Father, comes to you and says that this is wrong, such a thing should never happen to you. There are better ways of doing what you need to do. You need not suffer; you should not suffer, for you to suffer is wrong. Israel, the people of God need you, and they need you healthy not beaten, bloodied, and dying in pain.

Imagine someone challenging you to take another path than that of the cross; the temptation would be great. The temptation would make sense. In fact, it would make as much sense as Jesus being famished and turning a stone into a loaf of fresh, hot, bread. After all, he was able to feed five-thousand from five loaves. What is the harm in making one loaf from a stone? What harm would there be in doing such a thing? How could this possibly be against God's will? How could avoiding suffering and the pain of the cross be a bad thing? In that question is the temptation.

A few moments ago, Peter's voice held the Word and revelation of God. Now, that same voice carries the words and temptation of Satan. Peter, the rock, was now a stumbling block or a stone in Jesus' path toward Jerusalem. Consequently, Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

The line is drawn. For Jesus to be the Messiah means that he will follow the will of the Father even to the cross. He will take the path that is set towards divine things not human things.

What does all of this say to us in 2011? A traditional way of looking at this Gospel is to go to the next section where Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow.

The idea of taking up our crosses and following often speaks of sacrifice. It often challenges the Church and the lukewarm way in which we too often live the faith.

Jesus makes an unqualified call to a life of sacrifice. If we can hear this phrase from Jesus, we would find that it intrudes rudely into our safe, secure and convenient lives.

Here is a ringing challenge. True disciples must give up their "lives," and instead willingly make God their final authority. Only this kind of transformation will bring them eternal life.

Do today's churches offer a faith strong enough that it can command a sacrifice? Do any of us have enough faith to offer up a genuine sacrifice for Christ's sake?

Can a church in today's self-centered, self-help culture ask its people to sacrifice something for the sake of the gospel? Jesus' challenge to all would-be disciples requires more than a "feel-good" or self-hug spirituality. True discipleship asks, "Are you willing to sacrifice something for the kingdom?"

This is the traditional way of approaching this text. It focuses on doing as opposed to being. It is an appropriate approach to the text. However, today I want to look at one other part. I want to look at the temptation that stands in this Gospel.

We all know one level of temptation. We experience it all our lives. We know the temptation to break a diet, take something that does not belong to us, to tell a lie, cut a corner, and succumb to gossip, or nurture a grudge. We can play victim to get our way, or be self-righteous when we know we have done something as bad as the person we judge. This level of temptation we recognize. We can name it. We know that the barrier between this temptation and our acting on it is self-discipline or lack of it.

However, there is another form of temptation. This one is harder to see. It is like turning a stone into bread or listening to Peter urge Jesus to avoid suffering. It is a temptation that seems reasonable. It is the temptation to avoid being what the Father wills us to be.

We can allow our idea of temptation to settle so easily on the exterior things, diets, gossip, and grudges, the things of self-discipline, that we forget what the heart of temptation is. God has ordained our lives to be something. God has made our lives sacred. God has placed dignity upon us. It is the will of the Father that we be the Body of Christ in this world. Our daily temptation is to ignore what God has made us and wills for us. Instead, we sacrifice our dignity, value, worth, and meaning to the voices and wills around us. We stumble from being the people for whom Jesus died, to being people who listen to the voices of Satan. "You are worthless just as you were told. Give up and stop dreaming." "You will never accomplish what you want. It is easier to settle." "You know what, you are so much better than those people over there. Thank God you are not like them."

There are so many voices out there looking to make us stumble. The voices tell us that we should give up. They tell us we are failures. They tell us that we are somehow better than another person is. The truth is that Jesus went to the cross for all of us. He went to the cross because we fail. He went to the cross because we can be self-righteous. He went to the cross so that we can be authentic people not bound by the idols of this world but blessed and saved by the God of heaven and earth.

Our dignity, value, and worth do not depend on what is exterior. They are tied to the crucified God who died and rose for us. The temptation we face is to listen to the voices that pull us from God. These are the voices of self-pity, self-righteous indignation. They are voices that diminish our self-worth, and which Satan uses to cause us to deny who we are: the Children of God.

Listen carefully to the voices in your life. Are they the voice of Christ or of Satan? Listen closely for one is of life and one is of death. One is of divine things, and the other is of human things. In worship, we are grounded to the divine things so that we may be a blessing to the human things we face each day. Amen.