



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

February 25, 2018 ~ Second Sunday of Lent

The First Stage of Discipleship Formation

Last week's Pastor's Column introduced certain themes of discipleship and evangelization that will be unpacked in greater detail through the seasons of Lent and Easter. This week, we begin with the first stage of discipleship formation: recognizing that the main prerequisite for discipleship is faith in Jesus Christ, Who is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Because faith means (among other things) surrendering oneself entirely to Jesus Christ – repenting, being converted, and walking in His way (for He is the Way).

What this ultimately entails is that we must have the same mindset as the Lord Himself and not give in to the temptation of catering to what people want. Jesus Himself prays to His heavenly Father, "Not as I will but as You will." And we ourselves pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." This means that we strive to think as God thinks and not try putting our own ideas into practice. This is the complete self-denial to which disciples of Jesus Christ are called – the cross that we are to take up daily. This is a "school of life," and the Lord Himself is the Teacher.

Self-denial and taking up our cross daily so as to ensure that *God's* will is done and not our own – that requires repentance on our part. To repent is to be contrite for sins, for straying off of the right path, for deviating from *the Way*, Who is Jesus Christ. Repentance is the first step in that overall journey of conversion.

What inspires us even to repent in the first place? Faith in Jesus Christ. Faith that Jesus is Who He says He is, that He will fulfill what He promises to fulfill – that He is in fact the Way (the *only* Way) that leads us to Heaven. What Jesus said to Peter He says to us: "Follow Me." This we do if Christ's disciples we would be, and whenever that temptation lurks that lures us into wanting to stray off that Way – to do *our* will instead of *God's* will – Jesus is right there to protect us (if only we would let Him), and He tells us, "Get behind Me!" Faith is what empowers us to obey Him, to trust in His protection against temptation, sin, and evil, to lead us safely Home.

There are times when faith is shaken. The Way leads *to* the cross, and the cross is tough; it hurts; it is painful. "What have I gotten myself into? Where is this Way leading me?" Perhaps we even feel complete abandoned at times – unanswered prayers, no apparent help whenever we cry out for help. "First He calls us, then He abandons us – what gives?"

Such are the times when faith *really* is tested and proven true. There is a famous poem that describes footprints in the sand – two sets: one is mine (or yours), the other is God's. Things are fine for the most part, but then there are times when we are really up against it, and we notice in those times that there is only one set of footprints in the sand, and we cry out to God why in the worst times of life we have been abandoned. And God reminds us that in those times, there is a single set of footprints because those are the times when God is carrying us.

If we look back on the roughest times of our lives, maybe we actually can see that the Lord was there even then, sustaining us when otherwise we never could have sustained ourselves.

That is faith at its strongest. That is faith in Jesus Christ as the Way, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And faith is the first stage of discipleship formation.

~Fr. Lewis