

## **“Be nice, don’t offend anyone!” Mark 8:27-38**

**And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.**

**And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

**And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?**

**For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”**

Dear Brothers and Sisters, today’s Gospel reading will take us to quite a hard ride. It doesn’t leave a place for ‘be a nice person, don’t offend anyone, fun and awesomeness’ Christianity. It brings us to the very heart of what it means to be a Christian, and it is not about a walk on the beach.

Today’s passage will reveal us who Jesus is, what was His mission, and what exactly it mean for us.

In this very famous conversation Jesus enquires from His disciples what do people say He is. The disciples come up with different answer. Then Jesus asks the disciples: “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter, as always quick to answer on behalf of others, this time led by the Holy Spirit confesses: “You are the Christ.” Mark’s account is brief, but Matthew records also Jesus answer: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, [Peter] but my Father who is in heaven.” (Mat 16:17)

We may think that that was it. Peter nailed it. He got the right answer and Jesus was satisfied. Do not rush, as the next few verses will reveal us totally different picture.

Sometimes we may think that this is enough, to know the right answer to 'who Jesus is'. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Our Savior. Let's see how things developed with the disciples, and how Jesus Himself explained what was His mission.

Jesus replied: "This is good, you have given the right answer. But now I'll explain what my mission is." **"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again."** 'This is why I came. I tell you this so that you have a right picture of who I am and why I am here.'

As we can gather from the Gospel accounts, the disciples expected from Jesus something totally different. You know that Jesus had this mysterious power. He could do whatever He wanted.

He could heal, He could cast out the demons, He could win the disputes, He could raise the dead, He could feed the thousands, He could cleanse the Temple in Passover, alone!, He could even rebuke the powers of nature.

Basically He could do pretty much whatever He wanted, and no one could stop Him. Now, think about it for a while! If someone had such an irresistible power... where would he be heading?

He could achieve whatever He wanted. He could rule the world. In a very good and just way, of course. This is what Jesus disciples hoped for. They were arguing among themselves, who will sit at Jesus right hand and who at His left when Jesus establishes His Kingdom. Who and how will benefit from Jesus power and authority...

Does it remind you of something? Doesn't it remind of us and of many Christians who have exactly this understanding about what it means to be Jesus' disciple. He has a power and I can benefit from it.

He is God and if I stick with Him then I can ask for what I want and He may get me things that I can't on my own. How many Christians think similarly as the disciples did?

This is why Peter took Jesus aside and rebuke Him. "Jesus, this shall never happen to you!" Jesus death just wouldn't fit in with their expectations about the Christ. 'Where is the glory, where are the benefits?! How can you be our Saviour if you are dead?'

**But [Jesus] turning and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”**

We all should think carefully about these words of Jesus. Obviously, He didn't come to provide more earthly blessings for us. Sure, God cares for our daily needs and provides for our daily bread, besides He does it for the good and for the evil.

But Jesus' mission was to die, to die for your sins, and for my sins. So that on the Last Day when we all will stand before the throne of God, we could stand together with Christ, and He could say:

“Don't worry, all your sins, everything you have ever thought, coveted, spoken and done wrong, they all are forgiven. I took your blame, you death, and I give you my righteousness, my life. Come and receive it!” This was Jesus' mission.

Back then Peter hadn't got it, yet. Don't you wonder, why was Jesus so rude? Couldn't He simply explain Peter that he was in error. That he had misunderstood what Jesus' true mission was. Instead He rebuked Him: “Get behind me, Satan!”

You see, there are questions which we as Christians can ask, like Peter, which are nothing else, but Satan fooling us. In fact, these days we ask this kind of questions more and more. The problem is, that such questions don't look for God's will, but, instead, demand that our will happens.

This happens when instead of the question ‘what is God's will’, people ask ‘why can't churches do this, why can't churches do that?’ Peter wasn't interested to find what God's will for the Christ was.

Peter was only concerned about his will, about his desires to be fulfilled. The same way there are many questions that Christians today ask, which are not about enquiring for God's will, but instead demanding God to accommodate their whims. Then the proper answer is: “Get behind us, Satan!”

Jesus explained where the problem is: **“For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** This is it. This is a huge problem for us as Christians, that we don't want to set our mind on the things of God.

Christians sometimes think that Christ can be simply plugged into our agenda, as one more good and useful resource. We do our main stuff, and then we try to get some additional help from God.

Then we are not interested in the things of God, we are interested in Christ as much as He can help us to advance our agendas. Exactly as Peter and others disciples were looking to advance their goals by means of Jesus.

Now, if we know why Christ truly came, then what exactly this means for us as Christians? This is where it gets really hard. **“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”**

What Jesus requires from us is a total change of our mind, of our understanding, of our priorities, of our lives. The way we look at everything. **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”**

Now, let's talk about these words. How do they sound? So hard. Jesus, why couldn't you ask for something easier? Deny myself, take up my cross and follow you! What exactly are you asking from us?

In Gen 3, where the very essence of sin is described, our sin is revealed as disobedience to God's will, when instead of listening to our Creator in His Word, we desire to determine what is right and wrong on our own.

To deny myself then is nothing else that to return to the Lord, repent of our arrogance and rebellion, to realize that He is God and we are not. It simply means to realize who we are, God's beloved creatures, created in His Image and likeness.

Why does it sound so hard? Because our sin is real, and it can't stand the very thought, that we would deny ourselves and listen to God.

Next, take up your cross! What does this mean? Very simple – take on your God given responsibilities, your callings. Listen what your Creator expects you to be and how to live.

For husbands – how to love your wives, for wives – how to respect your husbands, for children – how to honour your parents, for parents how to bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

For employees – how to obey your employers with a sincere heart as if you were serving Christ, for all in charge – how to care for people you are responsible for, serving them as to the Lord. This is where you take your cross.

But why would we call this our cross? Because, we want to do things our way! We want to care about ourselves more than others, we want to consider ourselves as more important than others.

Just try to live faithfully the life that God has created you to live, and you will see how heavy a cross your sin and the sinfulness of the world will put on you.

Then, follow me! How do we follow Christ? When we are together with Him. Where can we be together with Him? There is only one place where He invites you to come to be with you and to bless you. In the Divine Service.

This is where we responding to His invitation, obey to His command come in His presence: to listen to His words, to receive His Holy Spirit and all the abundant blessing that He shares with us. Does it sound that hard?

But it is! It is extremely hard. Why? Because this is not about me. This is not what I want. This is about submitting to the authority of Christ and doing things not my way, but His way. This is why it is so hard for so many.

The funny thing is that once we hear what Jesus demands from His disciples, it seems so hard and daunting. But is fact, think about it! Jesus simple asks us to be who we are created to be and to live the live which we are created to live.

That simple. But when Jesus invites us to live out God's design for our lives, this is where we can see how strong our sin is. Your Creator says: "Be who truly you are!" Your Redeemer says: "I have come to restore you so that you can be who you truly are, and I give you my Spirit to help you with that."

Christ went through such a pain to free us from our sin, to give us freedom to be who we are created to be, to enjoy the fellowship with Him, He was ready to pay the ultimate price so that everyone can receive this gift. He did it for each of you!

And how do people respond? Just sneer about it, and ask questions like Peter... why can't I do it my way? Can't I be a good Christian without reading/listening to the Word of God? Why can't I worship God wherever I choose and how I choose?

Sometimes these are not even questions, but assertion. I can do it may way, and I will do it my way. None of these attitudes care to learn what our Creator and Redeemer expects from us. It is all about what I want, it is about me.

**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?**

The point is, and this brings us back to why Christ came, that if we choose to set our minds on the things of man, if we ignore God's gift which He purchased by His blood, for you!, we may obtain the whole world, for a few years, but we will lose our souls.

At the end, there will be nothing that we could do to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, that Christ today offers us for free. If the price for the forgiveness is the life of God's Son, how can we possible purchase it?

**Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

It is interesting how much these words refer to our situation. Whoever is ashamed of me and my words... This is exactly what is happening. This is why so many are leaving the Church. For they are ashamed of Christ and His words.

You know that the name of Christ in this world is an object of ridicule. It is not trendy. It is not cool. It is not progressive. It is not smart. It may be even offensive for some and uneasy for others that you are a Christian. Sometimes people may look at Christians with compassion: poor you... you are still with this Jesus!

Being a Christian is portrayed as if you were a person from the Middle Ages, superstitious, uneducated, biased. As a result so many are ashamed of Christ, of His Cross, of all this talk about sin and forgiveness, about the hell and eternal life.

But before whom are we ashamed? As Christ said - **this adulterous and sinful generation**. Exactly! This is such a fitting description for our culture. Adulterous and sinful generation. This generation should be ashamed, but they are proud.

They should repent, but they boast and ridicule those who disagree with their foolish arrogance. And before these people so many Christians are ashamed. They are ashamed to have sexual virtues.

They are ashamed to confess with their life and words that they trust Jesus Christ, who gave up His life for them. They are ashamed to belong to Christ's church, for it does stand for something that this culture can't tolerate.

The Church stands for God's authority which supersedes all powers of this world. It can't be destroyed, it can't be bent, and will bow to no one. The Church remains as a reminder that everyone will have to give an account. You are the Church!

The Lord of the Universe, the eternal and almighty Creator, the Holy God, from whom and to whom is everything that exist, He is coming to restore His fallen creation. He knows the day when He is coming back. He knows His people, and when He comes in the glory with the holy angels, then you will be with Him.

Jesus Christ wasn't ashamed to die naked on the cross, when foolish and evil mob laughed at Him. He wasn't ashamed to suffer being innocent, so that everyone could have a change to enter eternal life. He did it for you.

Don't you be ashamed! Be proud! Set your mind on the things of God! Be who God has created you to be. Deny yourself, take your cross, and follow Jesus! And remember, whoever you are – Jesus is not ashamed of you!

Amen.