

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

*Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Ps. 116; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35*

*Homily by: S. Mary Paul Mehegan, O.P.*

Last week most of us enjoyed the formal closing of summer with our Labor Day picnics and barbecues and have now entered our more serious schedules of work, schooling and activities of every kind. Our liturgy today for this 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday brings us messages from Isaiah, James and Mark—in close proximity to tomorrow’s feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

We believe that with our Baptism each of us has “put on Christ” and so we find ourselves face to face this morning with Isaiah’s graphic picture of Christ, the suffering servant, written centuries before the Passion. “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.” And again we hear St. Mark’s account of Jesus’ invitation “Whoever wishes to come after Me, must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.”

If this Eucharistic liturgy comes alive in us today, we must accept the fact that we, too, will meet difficulties and contradictions as we live out each day. The cup and bread we receive have to be a real communion with Jesus. The faith we profess needs to express itself in works of love of neighbor or it is dead. St. James’ letter points out the foolishness of any attitude that speaks eloquently of good wishes for a neighbor but fails to take any practical action to be of assistance.

Throughout his earthly life Jesus spent himself doing good to as many needy ones as He possibly could—healing the sick, raising to life, teaching the multitudes, feeding the hungry and much more. In his parables He highlighted the value of good works—the tree that bore good fruit, the lamps that were lighted, the seed on good soil, the wine for the wedding feast, the marvelous feeding of the large crowd with a few loaves and fish. His whole life was marked by generosity—a beautiful image of love for the people.

With Chapter 8 in his gospel Mark now begins to focus on the coming death and resurrection of Christ much more clearly. In the coming weeks he will bring the reality of our faith in Jesus to clearer light as we hear today Jesus’ invitation: “Whoever wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.”

Our cross may take many forms: patience with an elderly relative who needs our care, loss of a much needed job, sharing with someone who seems ungrateful or bearing cheerfully something else that we find painful. But let us take courage. The Lord himself will be our defender. He will be at our side sharing fully in our suffering as we ourselves share in his priesthood and glorious Passion.

At the heart of our Christian life is the amazing fact that with our Baptism we have put on Christ and this fact gives supreme meaning and efficacy to our life as we remember that the test of our faith will always be in our actions.