

## HOMILY

### The Twenty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

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I like the story of the young man, eager to make it to the top, who went to a well-known businessman and asked him the first reason for his success. Without a moment of hesitation, the businessman answered, "Hard work." After a lengthy pause the young man asked, "What's the second reason?"

Today I suggest we deal with the lure of the easy way. Jesus and his Disciples were at Caesarea Philippi. Their ministry to this point had been a stunning success. Crowds pressed on them everywhere they went. The Disciples were caught up in the excitement of it all. Jesus asked them, "*Who do you say I am?*" And Simon Peter answered enthusiastically, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Then Jesus changes the subject. He began to tell them that the crowds would soon turn against him; he would be crucified; on the third day he would be raised. The Disciples didn't know what to make of all this. Simon Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him saying, "*God forbid, Lord. No such thing shall ever happen to you.*" Jesus' response to Simon Peter is as harsh as any words in the New Testament: "*Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does but as human beings do.*" If there is any doubt that Jesus is resisting the lure of the easy way, listen to the words that follow: "*If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" Many of us are making the mistake of following the easy way. We see it in our family life. We see it in our work. We see it in our church.

There are two important truths that we need to call to mind. The first is that the path to personal success is that of self-denial. Zig Ziglar tells of visiting the Washington Monument. As he and his party approached the monument, he heard a guide announcing loudly that there would be a two-hour wait to ride the elevator to the top of the monument. However, with a smile on his face, the guide then said, "There is no waiting to go to the top if you are willing to take the stairs."

Successful people know that there is no limit to what a healthy, reasonably intelligent person in this society can accomplish if he or she is willing to “climb the stairs.” The opportunity is there for anyone willing to pay the price. Success in life requires a willingness to resist the lure of the easy way.

- ▶ A sound body requires that we exercise, eat the right foods and conquer bad habits.
- ▶ A sound mind requires that we read, that we observe, that we continually learn.
- ▶ A sound marriage requires that each partner goes into the marriage with the understanding that marriage is not a fifty/fifty proposition but a seventy/thirty one in which both parties give seventy percent.
- ▶ A sound family means that we will take the time to be sensitive to the needs of our children; that we provide not only for their physical needs but also for their spiritual and emotional needs as well.

Such goals require sacrifice; they require perseverance; they require determination. The path to personal success is the path of self-denial. We also know that self-denial is essential to the salvation of the world. Here is the missing summons of our day. Our world faces some tremendous challenges. Is there anyone who cares enough to act?

Some cynic has said, “When the going gets touch, everyone leaves.” That happened to Jesus. As the way got harder, the numbers of those who followed dwindled until finally he died on Calvary with only a handful of followers in attendance. Yet, if he had been unwilling to lay down his life, the world would never have known the love of the Father. If those early disciples had not picked up Jesus’ cross and followed after him, we still would not know about that love. And if you and I do not pick up the cross in our time and make those hard choices and assume those difficult responsibilities, our children’s children will not know the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

Richard Leaky, the famous paleoanthropologist who worked in northern Kenya, discusses in his book, *The People of the Lake*, what it is that separates man from the great apes. It is not man's intelligence says Leaky, but his generosity. Only human beings have the ability to share. Only human beings are capable of genuine compassion. Only human beings are capable of laying down their lives for a friend.

When it comes to taking up the cross of self-denial, many of us have not discovered our humanity. If we don't care what happens to this world, who will? If we don't feed the hungry, who will? If we don't shelter the homeless, who will? If we don't tell the world about Christ, who will?

How about you? The road to personal success is the road of self-denial. Any worthwhile self-help book will tell you that. Self-denial, however, is also essential to the salvation of the world.

The story is told of a worker in an inner-city mission who had given many years to a most discouraging ministry. A friend came to him one day and said, "Why don't you leave this job before you are broken by its inhuman burden? Why don't you run away from it all?" The man replied, "There are times when I would very much like to leave it all. But there is a strange, loving man on a cross who won't let me."

As Jesus said, "*If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" That is still his call to your life and mine today. Can he count on you? Will you join the company of the committed? Will you take up your cross today?