

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

September 12, 2021

Isaiah 50:5–9a • James 2:14–18 • Mark 8:27–35

I.

On Thursday,
the Cathedral hosted the “Violins of Hope” concert,
which was exquisite.

The musical instruments used in the concert are connected to the holocaust,
the extermination of six million Jews during the Second World War (1939–1945).

Some of the instruments belonged to those who perished,
others to those who survived.

The Nazi regime forced Jews to play the instruments
in order to humiliate and degrade them.

The Violins of Hope concert re-claims the violins, violas, and cellos,
and changes the meaning of the music they produce.

The purpose of the concert is to bring forth beauty from abomination,
and, in that way, to inspire solidarity, compassion, and respect among all peoples.

I sat in the second pew in the nave.

I was moved by hearing an accomplished violinist play an instrument
that belonged to Max Beker, a Polish Jew who became a prisoner of war.

In his camp, 63 fellow prisoners scrounged together some money and persuaded an
Austrian guard to buy Max a violin,
and with that he became a member of the camp orchestra.

The Violins of Hope concert helps people come to understanding—
not just in the academic sense of knowing about the holocaust,
but in moving them to prevent a similar tragedy from ever happening again,
by how they treat other people right now.

II.

Today's Gospel is about **understanding** and **conversion**:
Christ's **identity** and Christian **discipleship** are connected.

In other words,
one can only come to **know** Christ by **following** him,
by undergoing a conversion of life.

Peter correctly affirms Jesus' identity as the Messiah or Chosen One of God:
"You are the Christ."

But moments later,
Peter refuses to accept Jesus' declaration that he must suffer, die, and be raised.

That imposition of his own expectations on God's plan earns Peter a rebuke:

"Get behind me, Satan."

Christ then makes clear that his path—
suffering leading to exaltation—
is the path for all of his followers:

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me."

To really **know** Christ—
and not just know **about** him—
means **following** him with one's whole life.

At the end of the day,
professing faith in Jesus's identity is a way of life.

That's the only means of participating in the core and climax of Jesus' mission:
his passion, death, and resurrection.

To be a disciple is to be a follower—
to follow after Christ, imitating his example.

Discipleship is not just heroic moral effort,
as noble as that is.

Instead, discipleship is a response—
a generous response—
to God’s initiative and grace.

Christ goes before us.

His “conversion”—
in the sense of his passage from death to life—
brings about a moral conversion in us,
a change in how we think, speak, and act.

And then, at the end of our lives,
we come to share in Christ’s resurrection in a bodily way.

Jesus promises that a new kind of life awaits us:

“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for my sake
and that of the gospel will save it.”

That promise is a discovery to be made in each person’s life.

Discipleship is the voyage that takes us to that new world.

Christ is calling us to go deeper in life,
to discover for ourselves this faith that has been handed on to us:

“Who do **you** say that I am?”

May people drift away from Mass,
and from the Church,
perhaps without ever discovering what lies at the heart of faith.

Instead of drifting,
there’s another option.

It’s possible to follow the captain of the ship,
who freely offers his life so that we can discover
the meaning and purpose of our own lives.

In today's Gospel,
it's clear Jesus refuses be domesticated:

“You are thinking not as God does,
but as human beings do.”

And Christ insists on a radical way of life.

So, an encouragement and thought for today:

Let's not be satisfied with knowing **about** Christ,
because that would be selling ourselves, and the world, short.

Let's each come to **know** Christ more deeply by **following** him.

Some ideas for responding to Christ,
so that his promise comes to fulfillment:

1. Attend Mass during the week.
2. Confess your sins in the Sacrament of Penance.
3. As the Church asks, perform some work of penance on Friday,
which is always a penitential day, even outside of Lent
(*Code of Canon Law*, canon 1250).

The recommended Friday penance in the United States
is to abstain from eating meat.

4. As part of the parish's service project for September,
keep track of your steps,
and make a corresponding donation to the Cathedral's sister parish in, Haiti.

Likewise, plan to participate in the walkathon around the Cathedral on
Sunday, September 26.

III.

Understanding leads to change—a change in life.

I'm thinking of yesterday,
which was the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

I was in the seminary, at Catholic University in Washington, at the time.

I remember walking out of class and seeing smoke on the horizon,
billowing up from Pentagon.

2,996 people died in the attacks that day.

Nearly as many soldiers died in Afghanistan in the two decades since.

Regardless of one's age,
there is a moral obligation to remember:
to understand what happened that day,
and to live one's life accordingly,
to prevent something like that from happening again.

To live today, and the next day, with meaning and purpose,
so that people will not have died in vain.

“Who do you say that I am?”

We answer that question by how we choose to live today.