



April 14, 2019
- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

A COMFORTABLE CROSS

Regular exercise routines are good for the body and the soul. I see people populating the fitness center around the same time I do. Many of them appear to enjoy it, while others appear to push themselves through it because they must for their health or to claim the monthly insurance subsidy for going enough times. The approach, it seems, depends on a couple of things. First, is exercise a built-in natural inclination that the budding athlete has? And second, has the person developed a habit that allows them to complete the routines without seemingly unbearable exhaustion? Neither of these will be comfortable, but the latter will be able to work out with less discomfort than the former.

I think the analogy works with the Christian requirement of carrying the Cross. Passion Week brings the Cross of Jesus to the forefront. After three years of teaching and reminding His followers of the need to pick up their crosses and carry them, they will finally learn front and center what that means. But often, talk doesn't place the whole story in the hearts and minds of people. Images do the same. We can hear the message of the Cross. We can see pictures of the Cross, but until we live and carry the Cross, it is unlikely the fullness of its reality will set in. The same is true of Jesus. The stories of Jesus and the images of Him place an idea in us that often leads to an incomplete picture of the totality of Jesus.

Our liturgical seasons and celebrations help us to appreciate the whole Jesus, from being born as a baby, to His public life of teaching and example, to His passion, death, and resurrection. As is our tendency, we gravitate toward the familiar, the easy, and the comfortable.

Many of our brothers and sisters of faith are uncomfortable with the image of Jesus on the Cross. Perhaps the image seems too violent for them. Perhaps they believe it distracts them from His victory on the Cross. Perhaps the image of His suffering combined with His clear call to carry our crosses to be His disciple makes the corpus on the Cross unsettling for them. Comfortable or not, the crucifix in concert with everything else Jesus is, says, and does give us the whole picture of Him, and not just part of him.

Jesus and the Cross cannot be separated. His disciples and our crosses cannot be separated either. But we still gravitate toward the comfortable and we want our crosses to be comfortable. By definition, they won't ever be. Therein lies the heart of the challenge of living a complete Christian life of Discipleship. Crosses won't be comfortable, and they are not our choice. They are there for the picking up or not. Choosing to pick them up or not determines our discipleship.

The number of crosses we face is practically infinite and originate from our individual to our communal lives, those that we bring on ourselves and those that are foisted on us by life's circumstances. It can be tempting to interpret them as punishments, but there is no scriptural data that suggests Jesus is inflicting punishment when he commands that we carry our crosses. He tells us to imitate Him. His command is also infused with the gift of grace, to be able to carry them with grace and our cooperation with it.

But it still won't be comfortable. It is something we must do to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The Cross is set before us, and some of us may be more easily disposed to carrying them by natural disposition. By our nature, some of us may be more equipped to handle the disturbances and challenges that come in the form of crosses. The rest of us must learn, and we learn best by doing, despite the temptations to ignore and seek out what is comfortable.

Pursuing fitness in the body is no doubt easier for some than it is for others, but we all need to do it somehow. We all need to develop the habits of movement that keep our bodies healthy. Whether it is easy for us or not, we can get used to it. The same is true of our life of discipleship and carrying the Cross. It may not be easy but by doing it, we ingrain the habit that makes it routine, even though it won't ever be comfortable.