

In this week's Gospel (Mt 16:21-27), Jesus challenges His disciples with these words:



*“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.”*

What does Jesus mean? How do we deny ourselves and take up our cross? How do we lose our life for His sake in order to find life? With a little thought, examination of conscience, we can clearly understand the nature of what Jesus is saying. To put it simply, often times what we want to do is not what God wants us to do; furthermore, only by doing what God wants us to do will we find fullness of life. Therefore, it follows: only by denying ourselves for His sake (i.e. doing what He wants instead of what we want) will we truly find life. Or, to put it another way, when we choose to do what we want instead of what God wants we ultimately forfeit (lose) our life. In this context, to “take up our cross” simply means to do God’s will even when it contradicts our own. This is exactly what Jesus did when he took up His Cross: “Father, if there is any other way please let this cup pass from me, but not my will, your will be done.” Thank God Jesus was willing to deny Himself!

Now let me offer three concrete ways we can put into practice the following of Jesus through denial of self: 1) daily prayer (when we don’t want to!), 2) family prayer (when we don’t want to!), 3) concerned, attentive, loving care amidst the ordinary events of life (when we don’t want to!). I must confess I did not make these three up; I stole them from John Paul II:

The family *celebrates the Gospel of life* through daily prayer, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope. But the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family’s actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving. This celebration thus becomes a *service to the Gospel of life*, expressed through solidarity as experienced within and around the family in the form of concerned, attentive and loving care shown in the humble, ordinary events of each day. (John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, #93). [Emphasis mine]

Who among us would say: “The self-denial needed to achieve daily personal and family prayer is not worth the effort,” or: “The self-denial required to express concerned, attentive and loving care in the ordinary events of each day is not worth the effort”? The more we reflect upon our life, the more we realize the truth of Jesus’ words: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Your Servant in Christ,  
Fr. Terry Staples