

Hi, my name is Fr. Brian. I'm the new guy. I'll tell you more about me later, because for now this gospel is really cool. This gospel passage starts something new in Matthew's gospel, but first we need to understand some context.

So, does anyone remember last week's gospel? Last week was the famous scene where Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Jesus responding, "You are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church." That's important because it shows Peter really getting it right and making this important declaration about Jesus. Peter is flying high. And this week he's not.

This gospel follows right on the heels of last week's gospel, but unfortunately our translation here leaves out a few words at the beginning. Our translation should read, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly." "From that time on." Last week, something important happened in declaring Peter to be the Rock and Jesus giving him the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. And once that happened, Jesus could lead his disciples into the next steps of his journey, where he really would have to suffer and die.

It's also helpful to remember last week's gospel because it helps us to see the quick turnaround in Peter's standing in the group, and how much Jesus refuses to be distracted from his mission. So last week, when Peter said to Jesus "you are the Christ," Jesus said to Peter, "blessed are you, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." Peter was able to think with the heavenly Father. Now Jesus says to him, "Get behind me Satan, you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." As soon as Jesus stops thinking from a heavenly perspective and starts thinking from a human perspective, he is compared to Satan.

Last week Jesus said "You are Peter (Peter means rock), and on this rock I will build my Church." This week Jesus says to him, "You are an obstacle," which in Greek literally means stumbling block. Jesus is drawing a clear comparison between a solid rock that he can build a church on, and a stumbling block that gets in the way.

So Jesus refuses to be distracted from the mission that awaits him in Jerusalem. It's like he says to Peter, "You're still the first pope, I'm still going to build my church on you, but right now you're really not getting it." Jesus refuses to be distracted from the mission. And he invites us into that mission as well. He tells us to take up our own crosses and follow him. Here still, Jesus isn't making any friends. Everyone knew about crucifixion as a form of execution, and they all knew the Romans were very good at it. But it was such a gruesome form of torture and execution, you just didn't talk about it in polite company. So the disciples are undoubtedly shocked at this, but then Jesus doubles down as he says that whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. It's only through the loss of the Cross that you can hope to gain anything at all. To the disciples, a cross represents only destruction and humiliation. There is nothing to be gained by it. They hadn't yet learned to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, as St. Paul said. They hadn't learned that to go with Christ to the Cross is actually to gain the whole world.

And in 2000 years, I'm not sure we're much smarter. I know for myself, far too often I actively avoid the crosses present in my life. I struggle to see the burdens and difficulties in my life as something that Jesus offers to me, in order to help me grow closer to him. This happens when I try to carry my burdens without letting Jesus help me. This happens when I don't pray through my burdens. So, my friends, here's my challenge to you, and my challenge to myself. Take one burden, one cross, that you're dealing with right now, and bring it to Jesus here at this mass. The sufferings in our life are meant to bring us closer to Jesus, the God who suffers, but too often we get confused about that and we let the sufferings and burdens be obstacles instead of pathways to Jesus. So bring him one suffering, whatever it is, even a suffering you created yourself and is entirely your own fault, and without shame bring it to Jesus today at the Eucharist and let him help you with it. I guarantee you he wants to. Use the burdens and struggles of your life to draw closer to the God who suffers, the God who loves you.