

IMPACT

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.

When Jesus says, "deny yourself," he is not asking us to belittle or demean ourselves. He is asking that we set aside the pursuit of control, selfishness, and search security in worldly things. Jesus invites us to align our will with God's loving will.

When Jesus says, "take up your cross," he knows the gravity of the command. The cross is heavy and hard. Truth be told, we would avoid the cross if at all possible. But following Jesus means taking up our crosses with the certainty that he carried his cross for our sake, endured his passion, and rose in glory.

When Jesus says, "follow me," he is offering us a profound way of life. Discipleship is not always easy, yet it is a meaningful way of life.

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

What is your cross? What are the burdens, trials, pain, or obstacles you are facing right now? What hardship do you wish you could walk away from?

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. Let go of the endless pursuit of control and allow God in. Find the strength and grace you need to meet the crosses of your life through the power of prayer and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the companionship of others, and the faith that the Lord is with you.

Be strong, fear not! Here is your God. Jesus humbly took up his cross, following God's will to the end and into the glory of the resurrection. Be assured the Lord will carry you as you bear your cross. You are never alone. Follow Jesus. He knows the way.

Thus says the Lord

Say to those whose hearts are frightened:

Be strong, fear not!

Here is your God,

he comes with vindication;

with divine recompense

he comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,

the ears of the deaf be cleared;

then will the lame leap like a stag,

then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Streams will burst forth in the desert,
and rivers in the steppe.

the burning sands will become pools,
and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

- Isaiah 35: 4-7a



Jesus points the way

Imagine yourself walking with Jesus and the disciples. Jesus has just told them that he will be handed over to those who would kill him, and that three days after his death, he will rise. The disciples did not understand him, and did not know how to ask what he meant. They drop back a bit, following Jesus and talking among themselves. Rather than discussing his confusing words, however, they begin to banter back and forth about who among them is the greatest.

Wait, you might think. They're missing the point! They were physically following Jesus, walking just behind him on the road. But they were far from following his way, the way of mercy, forgiveness, and love. When they arrived at the house in Capernaum, Jesus asked what they were arguing about. Their silence was telling. In that moment, they knew they had strayed, even though they were so close in proximity to him.

Jesus' response rings in our ears, as it must have for those who heard him that day: *"If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."* In reflecting on what Jesus taught, Saint James realized that we must be "doers of the word and not hearers only." James knew that we have a tendency to remain complacent and inactive, telling ourselves in our heads that we are people of faith, but not allowing Jesus' call to love and service to have an impact on our lives.

It isn't only the disciples on the road with Jesus who miss the point. We miss the point sometimes, too. We become focused on self, stuff, and success rather than on God and others. Even with the pandemic still a concern, we may have lost sight of what we learned from our shared experience of it. Lessons such as how much more we need each other than the constant striving to be first or to come out ahead that so often consumes our time and attention.

Jesus points the way. It is the way of humble service, sacrifice, and compassion. The early communities of believers knew this so deeply they called themselves followers of the Way. Following Jesus calls us to take all he did and taught to heart, so that our way of life will be the Lord's way of self-giving love.

Every day provides an opportunity to serve another, often simply and quietly with little notice by the people around us. Saint James tells us that if we do not take these opportunities and act on them, we delude ourselves into thinking we are Christians, yet we fail to do as Jesus commands. Our actions must reflect our faith and be a response to Christ's call. For some of us, being the "last of all and the servant of all" comes naturally easily; for many, such living is a real challenge.

Let Jesus point the way.

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**"If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."**

Impact this Month

Reflect on your life and faith this month. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your heart and mind and let Jesus point the way.

How do you deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus?

How may you be called to stretch yourself in order to grow as a disciple who is the "last of all and the servant of all"?

What recent experiences come to mind in which you had opportunities to "do" the word, in which faith directed your actions?

