

**Sermon August 15, 2021 The Spirituality of the Cross Part X Vocation
(cont'd)**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today I continue on the topic of Vocation. Vocations are those positions into which we are called by God. These called positions are found in the four estates: family, church, citizenship, and the Common Order of Love. Vocations include husband, wife, child, usher, teacher, voter, neighbor, and so on.

Despite appearances, we do not choose our vocations. God calls us into each and every one of them. As we faithfully serve others in our various callings, we become the masks of God. God is meeting our needs through the work of other people, and he is meeting their needs through our work.

When it comes to being the masks of God and faithfully fulfilling the requirements of our vocations, we immediately encounter the cross. Living in the spirituality of the cross we have two experiences while being the masks of God. First, we often suffer under the weight of our vocations. Second, we find it is necessary to sacrifice ourselves on our vocational crosses. Suffering and sacrifice are the authentic experiences of following Jesus' instruction for us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

We don't like to suffer. It certainly doesn't make sense to run off looking for it wherever we can find it. This is especially true in our callings. However, many times we are tempted to make vocational choices in our own interests, rather than according to what is the best fit for us. Men seek beautiful women to marry as trophy wives even though they have nothing in common and their future looks dreary, especially later on after she loses her attractiveness. People choose careers that pay the most money even though their hearts and natural talents are leading them in another direction that pays less. Others take positions that grant power or prestige even though they are not equipped for that type of service and will not be effective in benefitting the people they are to serve. There is an endless list of mismatches that happen because people are avoiding the downside and seeking what they see as the upside in vocational choices.

It is helpful to consider the life of Jesus when we think about our vocations. Did Jesus take a high-paying position? No. He didn't even own a house. Did Jesus take a position of worldly power? No. He was a carpenter. Did Jesus seek prestige among his peers? No. Those who WERE all about prestige criticized Jesus for associating with prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, and other deplorables. If this is how Jesus lived, who are we to seek wealth, power, fame, and prestige at the expense of not serving others well?

In our vocations we will be called upon to suffer and endure inconvenience and hardships. A child may develop a serious illness and need numerous trips to the doctor and need medical procedures and special care. A faithful parent hangs in there and sees their child gets the necessary treatments. A spouse may develop a spending problem, drinking problem, gambling problem, turn out to be lazy, have a little temper or just grow cold. As we are faithful to our calling as a spouse, we stay with them as we seek a resolution to the problem as best as we can. On the day children discover their parents are not perfect, are unfair, and sometimes break promises, they don't refuse to obey them or announce that as soon as they are 18, they are moving out of the house. They remain respectful and honor their parents as imperfect as they undoubtedly are. The same is true in politics. There will always be people in office we don't care for. We are still under God's command to pray for them and be respectful. That may be very hard to do. So we suffer as citizens while misbehaving politicians try to work through Covid-19 and global warming, taxes and legalities increase, and freedoms go down. We suffer through it. Here in church, we have hard wooden pews in a room that is either too warm or too cold. Sometimes we have "klunker" hymns, uninspiring sermons and communion that seems like it will never end. In the Common Order we have inconsiderate neighbors, rude drivers, doctors with a poor bedside manner, scam artists, women who can't stop talking or wear WAY too much make-up and men with B.O. and a bad comb-over who mix plaids and stripes. Do you get the picture of how suffering will find its way into our callings in life? They are everywhere! Expect them. Recognize them. Endure them. Jesus did. In the Bible it says,

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the

likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2

This is the perfect example of how to properly fulfill the responsibilities of our vocations. There are times when we get so frustrated and overwhelmed in certain vocations we buckle under the pressure, and we just quit. We get a divorce. We write off a close relative. We stop voting. We resign from a committee and refuse to serve. Sometimes people quit church or even renounce their faith. This is common. It is because people do not either expect or understand the purpose of the suffering that is necessary as we faithfully serve in the vocations into which God has called us.

These sufferings do serve another purpose. They drive us back into the heart of God. There is no prayer like a prayer prayed under duress. These are also the prayers God hears best and answers best. Now we have been stripped down to our bare essence, and there is room for God to come into our lives and do his thing. Our faith grows. If answered prayer and increased faith are the end products of vocational suffering, then can we still view such suffering in the negative? Not in the least!

We bear the cross of suffering in our vocations. We are also called to bear the cross of sacrifice as we love our neighbors as ourselves. This is different. Suffering must be endured. Sacrifice will actually cost us something important. We may need to sacrifice time, opportunity, money, and possessions. It takes time for us to pray for all for whom God tells us to pray. We may need to sacrifice of ourselves with work that needs to be done on before of our neighbor. Sometimes the sacrifice is physical as when we give blood, donate a kidney or when a father, mother, police officer or soldier puts themselves in harm's way to protect their family or other people. This last year many healthcare heroes have been identified who have risked their own health by caring for other people. This is especially true of those who work in wings of hospitals set aside for patients with Covid-19. The people of God daily sacrifice themselves and their own interests for the sake of others. This is not natural. This is not popular. This is not today's road to self-fulfillment. Yet it is the way into which we have been called. We hear the words of Jesus;

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Luke 9

“Daily” in this verse signifies Jesus does not have in mind an occasional, mountain-moving spiritual event. He has in mind our everyday ordinary lives as we love our neighbors as ourselves in the vocations to which God has called us. He has in mind the daily sacrifices of time, possessions, and self, offered in his name in the service of others. All these things as are they are called – sacrifices. They may well not be pleasant, enjoyable, or fun. But this is the way of Jesus, and therefore offering ourselves in love of neighbor gives true meaning to our lives and satisfies our need for a purpose in life. As we offer these sacrifices of service, we can also have joy, just as it was with Jesus;

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Philippians 2

God help you to faithfully fulfill the tasks of the vocations to which he has called you. God help you to carry the suffering you endure as you carry your cross. Jesus, who gave himself up for you lead you into his joy as you offer yourselves in his name for the sake of others. Amen.

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