

“Forbidding or Doing?”

Tom Moore asks, “**Sacrifice is not a word we use much these days, is it?**” He continues, “When was the last time you used it or thought about it in terms of your own life? When was the last time you sacrificed anything for anybody? Come to think about it, there’s only one sport as far as I know where the term is actually used. Do you know which sport that is?” Moore suggests, “You can almost hear the commentator” like Harry Cary “announcing it over the radio, ‘And there it goes, a long fly ball to left; easy out, but the man on third tags up and trots home – Sacrifice fly.’”

Moore continues, “What a great idea – you’re out, but you helped someone else score a run. Baseball is one of the few sports where you lose but the team still gains.” Moore raises, “Have you heard the way one comedian” George Carlin “spells it out in his routine about the contrast between the hardness of football and the softness of baseball?” Moore quotes, “He says: ‘In football you tackle! In baseball, you ‘catch flies.’ In football you punt! In baseball you ‘bunt.’ Football is played on a Gridiron! Baseball is played on a ‘field.’ In football you score! In baseball you ‘go home.’ In football you kill! In baseball you ‘sacrifice.’”

Moore suggests, “Baseball may be the only sport where you actually can hear this word. It’s one of the few places anywhere that you hear it in a self-centered, take-care-of-yourself, don’t-worryabout-anybody-else society.” Moore continues, “In contrast to football, sacrifice may sound like a sign of weakness but I hardly think of any of those in this year’s World Series as weak.” “Baseball’s one thing – but life is quite another.” Moore asks, “Who sacrifices anything anymore in a time like ours? Who really denies themselves and takes up crosses anymore?” Moore concludes by exclaiming, “**Let’s live sacrificial lives for our Lord and one another!**” (Tom Moore)

Throughout the gospels, and especially, in Chapters 15 and 16, **Matthew reports how Jesus’ disciples tended to side with the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law in their disagreements with Jesus!** A major part of Jesus’ conflict with the legalists and even with his disciples – when they sided with the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, dealt with their self-centeredness and their profiting at the expense of others. Because Jesus manifested **God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for all people, especially for the vulnerable, the powerless, and those rejected by society**, he collided with the selfishness of the Pharisees and their allies. **It seems the disciples were unhappy when Jesus ridiculed those powerful religious leaders, because they were looking forward to reaping the same type of profit and power when Jesus would take control of the government!**

In the first part of today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, Jesus revealed to his disciples how the religious elite were going to inflict great suffering and death upon him! He also explained how God would raise him back to life – however, the disciples, evidently, were so shocked by the declaration of his eminent suffering and death, they failed to take seriously his promise of resurrection. They were more concerned with the destruction of their dreams and hopes of being the close personal assistants to the Messiah King!

In the midst of this context, Matthew reports, “**Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘God forbid it, Lord!’ he said. ‘That must never happen to you!’**” It is interesting, isn’t it, how shortly before Peter had been the star disciple – with special recognition and a promise because he declared Jesus to be the Messiah but in the moment of today’s Reading, the eldest disciple sought to **FORBID Jesus from fulfilling his words!**

At that moment, the Messiah did not look kindly upon Peter, his words, and his actions. “**Jesus turned around and said to Peter, ‘Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don’t come from God, but from human nature.’**” It is amazing how we human beings can go so quickly from being the shining example to being an agent of selfishness! However, we have no reason to be terribly surprised, since the disciples, especially Peter, had frequently shown support for Jesus’ enemies. Peter and the other disciples were unhappy, whenever Jesus taught about and called his followers to live the same self-giving and sacrificial love, which he showed through his healings and other extraordinary actions. **The disciples did not like the identity Jesus called them to fulfill.**

After Jesus denounced Peter's rejection of his purpose – Peter's demand, ***“God forbid it, Lord!”*** he confronted the rest of his disciples. Matthew reports, ***“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me.’*** Jesus not only called them to follow his example of self-giving and sacrificial love, he went on to argue against the selfish life lived by the religious elite, saying, ***“For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it.”***

After Jesus made his differences with the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law plain, he went on to explain how the full revelation of his Kingdom will include as part of the King's coming, ***“then he will reward each one according to his deeds.”*** By saying those words, Jesus did not cave in to the arguments of the legalists. Instead of talking about tallying one's sins and virtues, **Jesus laid out how one lives his or her life** indicates whether the person **belongs to Jesus and his way of self-giving and sacrificial love** or to the path of selfishness and profiting at the expense and suffering of others, as was done by the religious elite. Jesus called his disciples and he calls you and me to **DO – to be about Doing** the same **self-giving and sacrificial love** he was **Doing**, instead of **FORBIDDING – demanding we receive** the selfish personal profit, gain, and power we want and hope for ourselves!

James Moore discusses this tension, which we see between Jesus and his disciples when he shared, “Recently I ran across a story that absolutely amazed me ... and yet it's a story that may well represent the ‘cater-culture-give-’em-what-they-want world’ in which we now live.” Moore explains, “A church wanted to improve attendance at their major worship services, so they hired a powerful advertising agency to come in, study their situation, and make recommendations.”

“The ad agency did their research ... and then suggested to the church that they should get rid of all the crosses in the church ... because the crosses might send a negative message to prospective young worshippers!”

Moore responded, “Now, I'm sure that in its history, that advertising agency has come up with some brilliant ideas ... but, in my opinion, that was not one of them!” Moore argues, “We can't get rid of the cross! We don't want to get rid of the cross. The cross is the dramatic symbol of our faith, hope, love, and forgiveness.” **“The cross is the powerful reminder of God's sacrificial and redemptive love for us. And the cross is the constant signal to us of how God wants us to live and love today ... as sacrificial servants.”** “We are not called to be prima donnas”. Moore concludes, “We are called to be servants. We are called to take up the mission of Christ ... and to emulate the servant spirit of our Lord.” (James W. Moore, *Choosing the Way to the Cross*)

This scene between Jesus and Peter – his confrontation with his disciples, creates a clear challenge for each and every disciple – follower of Jesus the Christ! If you and I take this to heart, then each of us is faced with the same dilemma – choice! **Will you and I truly believe in and belong to Jesus Christ? Will we be about Doing the New Life in Christ – being Christ to one another and toward all people? Will you and I live his example of self-giving and sacrificial love? Will we be witnesses for our Lord by Living his way? Or will you and I be like Peter? Will we be about Forbidding – rejecting and denouncing self-giving and sacrifice? Will you and I live, instead, the selfish, self-centered, and profit at the expense of others approach?**

In today's Gospel Lectionary Reading, when we focus on the conflict between Jesus, Peter, and the rest of the disciples, our Lord and Savior's call for us is to be about **DOING the New Life in Christ** – to follow his example of living self-giving and sacrificial love toward all people, Jesus, and our Divine Parent! Let's not follow the **FORBIDDING of Peter** but, instead, let us **welcome the Son of God's transforming of our minds, hearts, and spirits to be his self-giving, sacrificial, and loving servants!** Amen.