

Today's readings speak about self-sacrifice and self-giving! In the first reading, we have seen that the prophet Jeremiah experienced trials and sufferings as a result of being faithful to God's call to serve as a prophet. Even though he went through all the struggles and sufferings, he experienced joy and happiness as a result of being faithful to God's plan for his life.

In the second reading, Saint Paul speaks about the need for sacrifice to live a holy life and to be faithful to God's will in our lives. Finally, In the

Gospel reading, Jesus reminds the disciples, "To take up My cross and follow me." In our human understanding, the cross does not make any sense: Losing a spouse to cancer does not make sense. Losing a son or daughter to drugs and alcohol does not make sense to parents. Living as a celibate and dedicating one's whole life to the Gospel does not make sense.

Recently, I heard a very meaningful story about reaching heaven.

An angel appeared to a group of people and asked them: "Do you want to reach heaven?" In the group, everybody wanted to go to heaven. So, the angel suggested making a heavy wooden cross to carry up to heaven. Each one made a very heavy wooden cross and started to walk. After a few days carrying these heavy crosses, the people found it was difficult to move on.

But, some were halfway and wanted to complete their journeys to reach heaven. In the group, there was a very smart and intelligent person, who had an idea to cut off a large portion of the leg of his cross to make it lighter. So, it was very easy for him to carry the cross with a lighter load and he walked in front of the other people. He almost reached heaven but there was a river that he had to pass and there was no bridge. He was a smart man but had no idea how to walk across the river. Slowly, the other people came to the river with their own heavy wooden crosses. They put their own wooden crosses over the river, walked across, and reached heaven. The intelligent man could not put his cross over the river because his cross was too short and so he could not reach heaven. This is a very simple story but it gives us a very meaningful message.

In our lives, too, we all have heavy burdens and crosses to carry. Sometimes, like the intelligent man, we try to cut off some of the burdens to avoid carrying our own crosses and in doing so, we try to cut corners and eliminate things that we really needed to learn in our life journey. But one thing is sure: we have to carry our own crosses without blaming or complaining and realize that they come in different shapes and sizes. Today, let us take a few moments to pray for someone, who carries a bigger cross than we do!

Life is not a bed of roses but a path of thorns. God gives us crosses and burdens and the same God gives us shoulders to bear them! The cross God gives us, God knows we can handle. They are designed just for us and perfect for us and no one can replace them. The crosses that we bear may seem larger than the crosses of others, but remember we do not know other people's complete stories and the weights and sizes of their crosses. We are like teabags. Our strength is revealed only when we get into hot water! Let us listen to the words of St. Mother Teresa, "Crosses and the sufferings are nothing by themselves. Our sufferings and crosses share with the passion of Christ as a wonderful gift, the most beautiful gift, a token of Love."