

**Thirteenth Sunday of the Year – Cycle A**  
**St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, Massachusetts**  
**July 1/2, 2017**

Scripture Readings: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a ✠ Psalm 89 ✠ Romans 6:3-4, 8-11 ✠ Matthew 10:37-42

There is a very sad scene in the movie *American Anthem*. It shows a young man who cannot accept the fact that he has lost one of his legs in an accident. The young man refuses to leave his room and he tries to keep everyone out of it, including the young woman that he once admired and loved. He keeps the blinds pulled down and sits alone in his darkened room playing music.

Now, contrast that scene with another scene. There is a friend of mine, Franciscan Sister Carla, who lived in a small town in Virginia. She spent each day visiting with townsfolk, always smiling, always doing things for the poor and the needy. Even into her seventies, she continued to work 12-14 hours a day. Surprisingly, she had severe diabetes and, like the young man in the movie, she had lost a leg. She frequently suffered infections in the remnant of her leg and was often in a wheel chair but she was always on the go and she was an eternal optimist.

Both of these scenes illustrate, in a moving way, one of the things that Jesus talks about in today's Gospel reading when he says: "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me."

Without minimizing the difficulty the young man in the movie endured, we look to the different responses from him and Sr. Carla, both of whom endured the same difficulty or cross. And it's this difference that we look at.

The young man, in his anguish, refused to take up his cross and follow Jesus; he refused to accept his new situation of having to face life with a prosthetic leg. His refusal brought deep sadness not only to him but to all those around him.

Sr. Carla had taken up her cross. She accepted her situation (although she would certainly have found it better to have two legs) and her acceptance brought deep peace not only to her but to everyone around her. She chose to focus not on her lack of a leg but on what she was called upon to do for others as a Christian.

All of us can relate to the situations of the young man in the movie and Sr. Carla. We, too, have experienced setbacks, sufferings, or tragedies in our lives. We, too, have experienced painful situations that we could not change. We, too, have faced the painful choice of how to respond to those situations. And, we have seen similar situations where one person comes away from a setback being very bitter and another person comes away being much better.

This raises a very significant question for us: Why is it that, for some people, a difficulty, a setback or a tragedy is stumbling block while, for others, the same situation is a stepping stone?

For an answer, I look to Dr. Viktor Frankl who addressed this question in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. In the book, Dr. Frankl discussed his experiences as a prisoner of the Nazis during World War II. He experienced firsthand the brutal climate in the concentration camps, which turned some prisoners into mean, bitter people and others into saints. He experienced firsthand the evil that drove some prisoners to despair and hatred and others to hope and love.

Frankl said that the difference between these two responses was faith. This faith, he said, put the people who experienced it in touch with a power that helped them maintain their humanity even in the face of incredible inhumanity.

This brings us back to our original question: What gave my friend Sr. Carla the courage to roll her wheelchair through the streets of Middleburg, Virginia, greeting everyone with a smile, feeding the hungry, clothing those with little or no money, giving hope and encouragement to the downtrodden, while another person in the same situation cannot find the courage to roll up the blinds and let in the light of day?

The answer is the same one that Dr. Frankl gave in his book: It is faith.

For the Christian, it is faith that, as Jesus brought new life into the world by taking up his Cross and carrying it, so we can bring new life into the world by taking up our cross and carrying it. It is faith in God's word to us in today's second reading, that just as we were buried with Christ in baptism, so we will be raised to new life with him because of that same baptism. It is faith that, despite all the setbacks we endure in life, God has a purpose for each one of us and God will help us to attain that purpose come what may.

Jesus' agony and death could have been viewed as the death knell of Christianity but, instead, it was just the beginning. From that pain and suffering and sacrifice sprang forth our salvation.

Let us pray for the faith and hope we need to move with and through our setbacks and obstacles and tragedies, so that we may live and love as God has called us to do. ✠