

Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 16, 2018

This week's Gospel and two Readings bring back memories of moments when I have suffered as the Gospel says "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

The first reading from Isaiah says, "I gave my back to those who beat me....The Lord God is my help; therefore I am not disgraced." This reading reminds me of ongoing discussions I have with a close adult. This friend attends Mass most Sundays, but has no desire to learn more about her Catholic faith. In the same breath, she has mentioned that I am in her life to help her grow closer to God.

My friend gets swept up in the American culture of materialism and relativism (I am not immune to these values.) My friend likes buying lots of material goods because "things" make her feel happy, at least temporarily, especially when she is sad. She also makes many decisions based on the beliefs of our secular society. The conflict comes when my friend, in an animated fashion, tries to persuade me to her opinion, in particular about the candidate to vote for in a political election. I tend to vote for pro-life candidates. My friend does not use that as voting criteria and asks me "Are you only voting for that person because he/she is pro-life? You are my only friend who is voting for that candidate." I will spare you the details of these confrontations. These discussions connect to the first reading because that is when I feel beat up, but I stand my ground as the first reading says, "See, the Lord GOD is my help." During these moments of discomfort I feel I am planting a "seed," a different thought in my friend's mind. I pray that someday my friend will learn more about her Catholic faith and as a result, begin living out more fully her Catholicism through "faith and works" as the second reading mentions. In the meantime, my friend and I have agreed to disagree, though, occasionally political discussions rear their ugly head.

The Gospel from Mark talks about Peter who replied to Christ's question of "Who do you say that I am?" by stating "You are the Christ." One of my brothers is named "Peter" because he came into the world under very adverse conditions and thereby, was given a strong name. My family endured great suffering while Peter was in the womb and after he was born.

While my mother was pregnant with Peter she got leukemia. In those days, the doctors did not know the impact of leukemia on an unborn child. The doctors told my father and mother that Peter may not be born alive and if he was, they should expect him to have multiple problems. As the pregnancy progressed, my mother got sicker and sicker. As an 8-year old girl I sensed that my mother was going to die. This was a period of great anxiety, fear and helplessness for my family. We felt like we were suffering on the cross with Jesus.

The bad news is that 10 days after Peter was born my mother died. The good news is that Peter was born totally healthy. After my mother's death, my father was left with 3

young children plus a newborn baby. My father said he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit that lead him to marry, 8 months after my mother's death, a wonderful, loving wife and new mother for his children. And that is why I feel my mother is a saint to take on 4 young children at the age of 27 years old. Would you be willing to do that? This is the short version of my family's death and resurrection story. I learned from this experience that even in the darkest hours of life there is light at the end of the tunnel. There will be a resurrection.

Laura Gundrum