

**Homily: Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1

Date: 21 September 2025

Preacher: Father John Holoduek, OCA

Christ feeds Four Thousand people, Peter professes Jesus: ***You are the Messiah***, which is to say, “*You are the Christ.*” This sets the situation for **Today’s Gospel Lesson: *What It Means to Follow Him.***

In the minds and hearts of the Jewish people at Jesus’ time, the Messiah was expected to be a Conquering Warrior who would defeat the enemies of God’s People and Set Them Free Forever. The Messiah, they thought, was meant to be the One Anointed with the Power and Glory of God. He would Free Israel from Oppression and He would rule from His Throne in Jerusalem over a Liberated and Affluent Israel.

Though, after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Disciples hear from Him that, instead of defeating enemies and setting up His Throne, Jesus would Prefer to Suffer and Be Killed. Peter Reacted to this and Began to Rebuke Him. He told the Lord that He should not speak of Suffering and Death. He is the Messiah! But, the Lord Rebukes Peter. Maybe, like Us, Peter was thinking like the World Would Think.

Jesus was Thinking about the Way to Eternal Life.

The Jews’ Way of the Messiah was Liberation from Oppression, especially from the Romans, a Majestic Rule of the Messiah from a Royal Throne in Jerusalem, Prosperity for Israelites.

Jesus tells His Followers that ***His Way of the Messiah The Cross!*** ...*Freedom, Glory, and Life is through the Cross!* Therefore, the Lord tells His Disciples that whoever would Follow Him has to take up Their Own Cross, just as the Lord takes-up His Cross. He says that whoever puts-aside the desires of this life...This Is Not the Priority. **Whoever puts the Desires of Eternal Life first, Will Receive It.** *The Lord teaches that achieving all things in this World cannot be compared to receiving Eternal Life.*

What does it mean to Love Christ? It Means to Follow Him! Jesus teaches us that to follow Him means to Walk with Him. This Path Leads to the Resurrection and Eternal Life. This Path goes Through the Cross...It Is a Path Through Golgotha, to The Grave Before It Reaches the morning of Pascha...Before We Ascend with Him into Heaven. The Lord allows Suffering in Our Lives...It is Inescapable, for it makes us more like Him. Christ is the Eternal Son of God Who Voluntarily took on Human Nature and Its Suffering. **This is the Pain Inflicted Upon Him for our Redemption.** *This is the Pain Inflicted Upon Us for Our Redemption*

Maybe this is Problem that Peter had with this Need for Our Redemption and Salvation.

Saint Augustine of Hippo says:

“The Lord has required that ‘whoever will come after him must deny himself.’ But what He commands is neither hard nor painful when He helps us in such a way so that the very thing he requires may be accomplished . . . For whatever seems hard in what is enjoined, love makes easy.” In other words, the Lord helps us with His grace, which the Holy Spirit gives us in many ways. Jesus tells us that His grace is sufficient for us, that His strength in us is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Ultimately, He gives us the great promise: that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Our Challenge: We are called to Take-Up Our Cross and Follow Christ. *We are First taught to Put-On the Mind of Christ.* We need the Holy Spirit; We need to put-aside the Mindset of the World.

These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:13-16)

Second, and as difficult as it is, we need to forgive everyone who might hurt us — and follow Christ in the Way of Grace, Love, and Peace. At the Cross, Jesus says, ***Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*** (Luke 23:34). Forgiving others who hurt us deeply seems almost impossible. But it is with the Grace, Love, and Peace of Christ that it becomes possible. The Way of the Cross is Not Easy, and it is full of Challenges, but it is the path of Redemption and Salvation. It is the path to Eternity with God.

The Way of the Cross leads to Eternal Life. This is the Way Jesus opens for us. He calls us to Follow Him to the Cross as a Means to Glory. We must be Courageous in Suffering and Opposition to this World.

All those who follow Christ through Grace, Love, Peace, Prayer, Repentance, and Virtue are transformed. All those who seek Theosis, that is, union with Christ, spiritually see the Divine Light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the Light of the Transfigured Christ. The Way to that Glory and Divine Light passes through the Cross, Denying the World, and Following the Way of the Cross.