

**Homily for Mass for Couples Married Fifty Years or More
The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Reverend Fathers and Deacons, [consecrated men and women,] my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York and President of our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, once quipped, “The one thing Our Lord can never be accused of is false advertising. How blunt can you get? ‘Unless you take up your cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple.’ Hardship, sacrifice, suffering, adversity, struggle – it’s necessarily going to be part of the life of the disciple.”¹

Perhaps we have heard these words so often that they have lost something of their force: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). These words should, at the very least, startle us. They ought to give us pause and concern. They should make us question what we are doing here. They certainly caught Saint Peter and the rest of the Twelve off guard.

“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,” Jesus says, “but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Either what Jesus says is true, or He is mad. These words of His should make us question – seriously and honestly – whether He is worth following.

This is why, before speaking these words to the Twelve, He asked them, “Who do people say that I am” (Mark 8:27)? After hearing the Twelve give Him what others say about Him, Jesus turns the question directly to them: “But who do you say that I am” (Mark 8:29)? This question He addresses personally to each of us, as well: “Who do you say that I am?”

Whatever our answer to this question, our response, of course, does not determine the reality of who Jesus is. Rather, our response, our answer, shows how intimately we know Him and how closely we are willing to follow him. For this reason, Saint Peter gives the supreme answer: “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29), and in Saint Matthew’s account, Peter adds, “the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16).

Though Saint Peter recognized the truth of who Jesus is, that He is the Messiah, the Son of God come to save us, he misunderstood how this salvation would be brought about. For this reason, when Jesus solemnly foretold that He “must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed,” Peter “took Him aside and began to rebuke Him” (Mark 8:32). In Saint Matthew’s Gospel, we read another detail: Peter said to Jesus, ““God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). Unwittingly and with good intentions, Peter tried to prevent the Father’s will and to bring about salvation by his own means and power. Whereas just a moment before Peter answered correctly, now he answers very much incorrectly.

We, like Peter, sometimes try to skirt around the cross, to avoid it or even to lay it aside, seeking an easier, more pleasant way. Whenever we do so, the Lord Jesus also looks at us and rebukes us, saying, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do” (Mark 8:33).

To get behind Jesus is to follow Him; through this rebuke, Jesus reminds Peter of that initial call, when the Lord said to him at the Sea of Galilee, “Come after me, and I will you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

At every moment of our lives we have the option to try to lead Jesus where we think He ought to go, or to get behind Him and follow Him where He knows we need to go. We either view Him as the Christ, or simply as one good teacher like any other.

There is no other way to be a disciple of Jesus than to take up the cross in whatever form it comes to us. We forget that wherever we are, there is the Cross, as Peter himself found. "If you're going to put out into the deep, the Cross will be there. If you're going to fall in love with Jesus, the Cross will be there. If you're going to let Jesus wash your feet, the Cross will be there. The Cross is the classroom of sanctity, the professor of perfection, the arena of heroic virtue!"²

Those of whom the Lord has called to the vocation of marriage, have the mission to reflect for the world the love Jesus Christ has for His bride, the Church. You are called to love your spouse in the same way Christ loves his spouse; you are called to embrace the Cross in your lives. The Cross is the ultimately sign of the love of God and it is this love that must be continually given to both spouse and children.

Your confidence that Jesus is indeed “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” has brought you here today to receive His Body and Blood and to ask His continued blessings on your marriage and to give Him thanks for these many years of married life. You have come today because you know that without an acceptance of the Cross, no marriage can succeed.

I offer my most sincere congratulations to you who have been married fifty, sixty, and even seventy-two years and I thank for the beauty of your committed love. Your marriages stand as a clear testimony to the sanctity of the marriage and to the truth that the teachings of the church are not outdated or unrealistic.

We gladly join our prayers and gratitude to yours and ask the Lord to allow the example of your faithful and committed love to shine brightly before the world in witness to the love of Christ and the sanctity of marriage. Let us pray that having taken up the Cross in your marriages, younger couples will be inspired to follow your example that they, too, will follow the example of self-less love of Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Timothy M. Dolan, *To Whom Shall We Go? Lessons from the Apostle Peter* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 63.

² Timothy M. Dolan, *To Whom Shall We Go? Lessons from the Apostle Peter* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 63.