

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, September 3, 2023
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A

After giving an address in Melbourne, Australia, the famous Viennese psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was given a boomerang as a gift. Dr. Frankl thought for a few minutes and then said that he felt the boomerang symbolized human existence. People assume that the function of the boomerang is to return to the thrower. But this is not correct – because remember that the boomerang is actually a weapon. The boomerang returns to the thrower only when it misses the target.

Frankl commented that the same is true in life. We return to ourselves to become self-centered when we have failed to find meaning in life. Let me put it this way: If you live for yourself only...if you work to get things only for yourself...if you spend your money or resources only on yourself and those closest to you...if you squander your time and days only for your indulgence and pleasure, only for your enjoyment and entertainment...If you use your energy, talents and resources only for your own sake or benefit - you pay the price of meaningless existence and unfulfilled life.

That analysis of life coincides with what Jesus says in today's gospel: **“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

Paul David Tripp has this reflection on today's gospel passage: **“The purpose of the cross is to completely decimate your loyalty to the most seductive, most powerful, most deceiving of all idols – the idol of self.”**

This “idolatry of the self” which Tripp talks about is prevalent today in our “selfie culture.”

- You see it in the whining of a little boy.
- You see it in the sense of entitlement of a teenager.
- You see it in the needless argument of a married couple over something unimportant.
- You see it in the resentment and bitterness of a person.

This “idolatry of the self” is pervasive in us that is why the Lord is calling us to deny ourselves and take up our cross in order to follow him. The “idolatry of the self” is the reason for so much of the brokenness and woundedness, of the pain and suffering experienced by so many. It is the foundation of so much sadness and sorrow. It generates cruelty, violence and war. It is a personal and moral disaster, yet it seduces us all. Its power draws all of us in. We see it in others and deny it in ourselves.

The idol of idols really is the idol of self.

We make it all about us. We put ourselves in the center of the story. We pull the borders of our cares and concerns into the narrow confines of what we want, what we feel, and what we think we need. We evaluate life from the vantage point of “me-ism” – ME first before anybody else, before anything else. A good day is a day that is pleasurable or easy for me.

It is a life shaped by the “idolatry of the self.”

Yet, the first four words of the Bible – “**In the beginning, God**” – state the principle by which we must live:

Everything in us and about us must begin with God. This confronts us with the inescapable reality that it is not all about us – it is all about God. Life comes from, is controlled by, and exists for God.

We will never be at the center because God is.

- It will never be about us because it is about Him.
- Our *will* is not to be done because His *will* is to be done.
- We will not rule because He rules.
- Our Kingdom will not come because His Kingdom comes.

The way of choosing self-denial and the cross is difficult because our *self* is reluctant to die. Our *self* is reluctant to allow God to work in us, reluctant to trust that God will do great things through us when we follow his way, which is the way of the cross, the way of selfless love.

But that is precisely what the Lord is expecting from us: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”