

Matthew 16:24-28

Given that we had the Feast of the Transfiguration, our daily gospel reading needs a little context. Before today's gospel, Jesus asks "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is.*" The apostles responded that the polls were quite divided. Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Thankfully, Peter got it right. "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

Unfortunately, Peter received a little rebuke from Jesus when he tried to prevent Jesus' passion. For Jesus, Peter was an obstacle to Him. Peter was thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.

Today, we have the famous phrase of "picking up your cross" and following Jesus. Picking up your cross means denying yourself for the sake of others. Sometimes, I say it means "pinching your will" and what it wants. It means looking for ways to give up your selfish wants, personal plans, and sinful habits.

Thoughts: Taking up your cross can mean battling bad thoughts. My priest friend calls it "stinking thinking." Most of us wrestle at times with critical thoughts, jealousy, self-condemnation, or impure thoughts that pop into our heads. What you *do* with such thoughts is critical. Making an act of the will to reject such thoughts and crying out to God for help is meritorious.

Language: Taking up your cross can mean avoiding angry, foul, or mean speech. When correcting others, it can mean doing so with gentleness and love that give others a chance to change. It can mean encouraging others by looking for ways to compliment and give people hope and peace to those around you. It can also mean letting others talk first or much more than you – putting on your listening ears.

Actions: Taking up your cross can mean letting go of control of your plans or insistence on doing things your way. It can mean demonstrating patience when others make mistakes or being kind to someone who frustrates you. It can also mean choosing to forgive instead of holding a grudge. It can also mean doing things you don't like with a positive attitude or at least without complaining. Finally, it can mean standing up for truth by saying something for which others may mock or reject you.

Taking up your cross is not a pleasant experience. Doing what's right isn't always pleasant. Not only does Christ command us to do it, but it is the way that leads to Christ and sharing in His Resurrection.

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!