

Week 2: “Not my will but yours”

Last week, the way of the cross was introduced with Jesus’ words, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34). In these words Jesus invites us to a lifetime journey of self-denial in taking up the cross, which is our Christian vocation, and following him. Jesus is inviting us to abandon that false self we create so that as we decrease, he might increase in our lives. Discipleship to Jesus is incarnational. In following Jesus, he dwells in us with a new creation as we each discover our new identity of service with him for others.

Jesus models the way of the cross by beginning with prayer. Immediately after the Last Supper Jesus went for a walk to pray. He took Peter, James and John with him. In Matthew and Mark, the garden is named Gethsemane; in Luke it is called the Mount of Olives, and in John it is identified with a garden across the Kidron valley (see the readings above).

Jesus knew his time of suffering had come. He had told his disciples three times of his suffering, cross and resurrection, but they did not understand. At Gethsemane, he said to the



disciples, “*Pray that you may not come into the time of trial*” (Lk. 22:40). Jesus knelt apart from them in prayer, saying “*Father if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done*” (Lk. 22:42). An angel appeared to him and gave him strength.

Noticing that the disciples had fallen asleep during prayer, Jesus said to Peter, “*Could you not keep awake*

one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mk. 14:37-38). Three times he reminded them to pray, but they could not remain awake in prayer to watch and wait with him.

The way of the cross begins with faith and the prayer of self-denial, asking that God’s will be done in our lives. Prayer is a return to God. This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *metanoia*: “*watching with Christ in Gethsemane*” (*Letters & Papers* 7/21/44). The prayerful gaze of the heart fixes itself upon Jesus, who always remains with us. Daily do we seek God’s will as we pray for others, the world and ourselves?

In this week’s meditation, we are aided by two images of Christ. *Agony in the Garden* (1590), shown above, was painted by Doménikos Theotokópoulos, known as “El Greco” (1541-1614), a Greek artist of the Spanish Renaissance. The other image below, is “*Disciples in Gethsemane*” (1973) by Sadao Watanabe (渡辺禎雄, 1913-1996), a Japanese Christian artist who used Japanese pattern, color, and printing techniques. Reflecting upon these two images of Christ better allows us to see Jesus, the Word, dwelling fully in our humanity. Through works of

different eras and cultures, we see the integration of faith, scripture and art, witnessing to the intersection of Christ and culture. Christ continues to be incarnated in all cultures and ethnicities by dwelling in us through faith.

In El Greco's painting, the colors of Jesus' clothing are symbolic. His red inner garment is his divinity, while the blue outer garment reveals his humanity. El Greco is showing us Jesus as fully human and fully divine. The painting reveals the moment in Luke's gospel when Jesus, strengthened by the presence of the angel, overcomes his fear of suffering through earnestness in prayer.

El Greco also shows the three disciples asleep. They have been weak in prayer, unable to watch and wait with Jesus. Jesus' words, "*Could you not keep awake one hour?*" are also spoken to us, encouraging us to be vigilant in prayer. In the distance behind Jesus, Judas and the soldiers approach to betray and arrest him.



Watanabe's stenciled print describes Matthew and Mark's gospels, and the words "*for their eyes were very heavy.*" Jesus and the disciples are clothed in garments of Japanese patterns, tied at the waist with a band of cloth called an *obi*. By showing Jesus and the disciples in indigenous patterns, Watanabe is describing the way Jesus continues to assume the full humanity of all peoples, cultures and ethnicities. Jesus' suffering identifies completely with our human weakness and sinfulness. The words "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin*" (2 Cor. 5:21) describe the incarnation.

In Gethsemane Jesus modeled self-denial in prayer, as he struggled with human weakness and fear. Jesus prayed, as we do, to be spared from the cup of suffering. Yet his words, "*not my will but yours,*" reveal that Jesus himself also experienced the self-denial that leads to the cross and a life of humble service. Jesus does not ask us to walk a path that he has not already traveled upon for all of humanity.

In Holy Baptism, each of us have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We have each been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, who in taking our humanity upon himself, shares his divinity with us. The meaning of the incarnation is not simply that the Word became flesh, but that the Word continues to dwells in and among us.

In Watanabe's painting, Jesus' hands at prayer are large hands praying for the world – for you and for me – for all people, ethnicities and human identities. The incarnation of Jesus and his self-emptying love is poured into hands of prayer that carry the humanity of us all.

May your hands be large in prayer, carrying the concerns of others. Jesus asks us to deny ourselves, watching with him in prayer. Be Jesus' hands of prayer in this world. May you experience the *metanoia* of prayer, asking, "*not my will but yours.*" Amen.