

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

“From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem...” he must go. Jesus must go because it is the will of his Father in heaven, to go to Jerusalem, to “undergo great suffering...and be killed, and on the third day be raised,” is exactly why the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” And this is God’s will.

It was not yet time for Peter and the rest of the disciples to understand, and so after his inspired confession “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” when for a moment or two he probably felt on top of the world, this word from Jesus, that Jesus must go, must have been jarring.

Simply can’t be, Lord you’ve got to be mistaken! Surely the Messiah, the Son of the living God was not going to suffer and be killed. Notice how “and on the third day be raised,” apparently didn’t register at all with Peter.

Now you don’t rebuke your teacher, the Lord, in public, so “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him”. “This must never happen to you.” The talk about suffering, being killed, no! that’s not how it’s going to be, Peter is busy trying to fit Jesus into Peter’s notion of what the Messiah was. There’s that word again – “must” as in “must never happen” as far as Peter was concerned but Peter didn’t understand at that time, Jesus’ “must go to Jerusalem” far outweighs Peter’s “must never happen”.

Jesus knows what is coming and he is well aware that Jerusalem is not kind to prophets, and certainly will not be kind to him. But Jesus understands the necessity of doing what he was sent by the Father to do. The time is coming when all will be fulfilled and Jesus is resolute in facing and accomplishing the mission set before him. Jesus knew that it was precisely for this hour that he had been born, all that has happened from his birth to his baptism, to resisting temptation in this wilderness, to his ministry, all has all been preparation for the moment to come. The sin of the world, including you and I my friends, is precisely why Jesus’ death was necessary.

Our very first forefathers rebelled against God and in numberless ways, this has continued through the ages, the defiance of God’s will is so deeply embedded that it’s not even recognized for what it is, much less purged by us, from our hearts. We don’t want to acknowledge much less visit the deepest parts of us, the parts called sin.

Jesus knows he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die for our sins, but he also knows he must do this for us. Jesus’ “must go,” generated by the Father is the ultimate in love, love of the Father, love of the Son. Love precisely for this very hour, for us.

Jesus went through the temptations in the wilderness, now he faces the temptation offered him by Satan through Peter. Why go to the cross when you don’t have to go?

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Jesus’ mission was not to live in the shadow of the cross, no, his mission is the cross. Jesus’ mission of salvation was at hand whether Peter and the rest of the disciples like it or not. And on the cross Jesus would exclaim as he died: “It is finished!”

Finished, Jesus died for us, but remember he also said “and on the third day be raised”, he was raised from the dead on that very first Easter. Jesus was on path that he “must” follow and he links it to the path that we and all disciples “must” walk, for each of us “deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Disciples must die to the “old self” that the “new self” be raised through baptism, disciples must lose the old values of the world set before them. God acted decisively and ultimately through Jesus that our sins are forgiven and we are called to live new lives as disciples of Jesus.

For our part, to refuse this is to lose all that Jesus suffered and died for, gain the world but forfeit life. To lose your life for Jesus’ sake is to find true life. Notice the word “must” isn’t specifically used by Jesus as he tells his followers what they must do, but it’s there nonetheless. There’s no “maybe” in his call, to take up your cross and follow Jesus is to give your life to him, no compromise, no negotiation, no balancing the good we’ve done versus the bad we’ve done.

Are you willing to go with him who “must” go to suffer, be killed, buried and be raised again? Jesus said “those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

AMEN