

September 16, 2018 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in ordinary time

11 people were being rescued by helicopter and all 11 of them were on the rescue rope below the helicopter. Then the pilot told them, "One of you is going to have to let go or we're all going to die, because you're all too heavy." 10 men and one woman. The woman spoke right up and said her whole life had been one of sacrifice for her children, her husband, her parents. Now she would be willing to sacrifice one last time by letting go. With that, all 10 men applauded.

Jesus asks us a question in the gospel today, "Who do people say that I am?" He asks this question and we think it's obvious. These guys have seen him perform miracles do all kinds of amazing things. Jesus asks this question because He knows that most people don't get it right, people have a misunderstanding of Jesus. We see the responses; we see John the Baptist, Elisha, another one of the prophets. Some people have a wrong idea of all of that. But it's crucial, the way Jesus decides who He is, is the way we relate to Him. If Jesus is John the Baptist then we only have to look to him for guidance regarding moral instruction, this is bad this is not bad. If He is Elisha then He is a mystical figure heralding the end times, because for the Jews Elisha was going to walk in your door and tell you, "Times up". And if He is merely a prophet then He's a spokesperson for God and not God. Therefore, He prompts us to probe our own preconceptions, our own assumptions, our own labels. Most people reduce Jesus to what we'd like him to be. Some people think Jesus it is just a man, He's my friend, He goes along with me when I'm by myself. Some people think Jesus is an ATM machine, if I punch in the right code He'll give me what I want. On and on and on and on. So the question comes from the gospel today, who do we think Jesus is? But more importantly, who do we think that we are? Because, only Jesus can reveal to us who we truly are. If we take the sum total of everything we are, then we come up with a truly pathetic picture of the human being. We look around us and see all this wonderful politeness and manners that's not going on. All the insults and tearing down of people. Human beings are pretty pathetic creatures if we just stick with that. Only Christ can reveal the beauty and dignity of the human person. He does so by inviting us to discover who He is. Peter makes a declaration, "You are the Messiah; you're the Savior, you're the Healer", on and on and on. But when you look at Peter later on, does he truly understand what he's saying? Because at the time of Jesus, people have thrown away the Scriptures that say who the Messiah is and they've come up with their own version, once again of who Jesus is. A mistaken version. That Jesus is going to overthrow the Romans, that Jesus is going to be a military commander, that the Savior is going to do earthly things. So, they've thrown that away. So is Peter still thinking of that one? Or is Peter understanding the other one? Based upon his later actions in the gospel he doesn't understand who Jesus is. Jesus wants us to understand Him so bad so that we can understand His mission, so that we can understand who we are, that He rebukes Peter in front of the other disciples. if you are a business manager or a leader of people, you realize; praise in public criticize in private. So for Jesus to rebuke Peter in front of everybody shows how serious He was about, "Who am I?" To decide who Jesus is by human standards is satanic because you can't do that by human standards, you have to move up into the supernatural. Once we know who Jesus is then we can embrace the truth about ourselves. That's why Jesus calls the crowd and says this is what needs to happen to be true disciples, you must do these things to be Christian. Christian, we say we are following Jesus, then we need to know who He is now to follow Him. Otherwise we're following the wrong person. We're probably following ourselves. And so He says you have to have self-forgiveness, self-forgetfulness, holy self-forgetfulness. We remember things about ourselves that only separate us from Christ, so we need

to forget those things and really focus on charity, serving others, being open and available to others. We must take up our cross to be saved from taking up things that would otherwise destroy us and damn us to hell. We've got to follow in His footsteps to blow away our own will, our own desires. And you know, if we're following our own desires then we have a problem. We are not going to send ourselves to heaven. If we look at the cross, the cross and taking it up, what does that mean? What does that mean exactly? We hear it all the time, "Take up your cross, offer it up." What does it mean? It means many different things. For Catholic Christians it means vocation. Most people don't think of vocations in this manner. In fact, when you say vocation in this manner people automatically go, "Priesthood". No. The Church has many vocations. We have vocations to the single life; we have vocation of widowhood, we have vocation of marriage, we have vocation of parenthood, we have vocation of the priesthood and religious, all these vocations working in the Body of Christ. Our vocation is our way to salvation. A vocation is the way we are going to follow Christ and to know who Christ is. Our vocation is our cross. We take it up every day. Most of us don't think of it as a cross. We wake up and think, I'm married; he's still there she's still there, I'm married. Then when they are not, their widowed. I wake up trying to figure out what day of the week it is, then I try to figure out who I am and what's going to happen and where I'm at. I was a military brat, moved around a lot so I still always do that. And then I remember, ah priest, I have to say Mass this morning. (And really, I don't mean have to.) Protestants always say to Catholics, "Why do you say you have to go to Mass?" We really mean, we want to go to Mass. So, we have our vocation. We wake up and it's the day-to-day thing and we don't think it's a cross. We think of a cross as when something comes out of the blue. Bam! A car wreck hurts one of our family. I got laid off. Bam, the doctor says I need knee surgery or hip surgery or brain surgery. We have these things that we think are crosses and we don't think of our vocation as a cross. Because we don't really truly think about the meaning of the cross. Jesus Christ went up on that cross voluntarily but for the first few centuries of the church we did not use the cross as a symbol. We were so embarrassed by this cross, by this instrument of torture this humiliation that happened to the person up there, that we didn't want to accept it. We used the symbol of the fish. It doesn't work very well in Arizona, there's not a lot of fish running around here, on the Mediterranean okay fine. Finally, we began to accept the cross because we began to realize what the cross means. The cross is a way to salvation, it's a tool an instrument of salvation. When we say vocation is across then that's also our way to salvation. People who have vocations tend not to get in trouble as much as other people. They have direction in life. They wake up and they know what they're going to do. My brother used to tell me when I was discerning the call to the priesthood, (he had a wife and four kids), he said, "When I wake up in the morning I don't have to discern what I'm going to do, I have to go to work to feed the family." I said, " Well yes, that's your vocation, I'm still working on mine." Because I had the vocation of singleness. And we discern that. But our vocation is our cross and our way to salvation. If we're married our spouse is the way to heaven. For parents, our children are the way to heaven. They make us sacrifice, they make us forget ourselves, they become Jesus to us. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to love your spouse, to love your children, to love your parish if you are priest and parishioners. It's all rolled up into one and we don't think about that. We hear things like, "Well, I've got to go home to the old ball and chain." Things like that. That's not a vocation understanding. That's not understanding what the cross is. To take up our cross is to take up our vocation, our daily life; today I'm going to love my spouse, today I'm going to watch their back, today I'm going to forget myself a few times and work on them. Same thing with the parish, same thing with all vocations. We all have different vocations in each vocation is different in the way they express themselves, but it's all our cross. Jesus went up on the cross to save us. I tell couples, "You are getting

married to save yourselves.” They’ll tell me, “Augh, we’re getting married because we’re in love.” How long is that the last? You are getting married because you’re going to try to get each other to heaven. Your spouse is supposed to try and help you do that. That’s what the vocation is about, trying to get to heaven. And if you don’t have a vocation, if you are not following in Christ’s footsteps, then you are open to (I use the generic term) sex, drugs and rock n roll, the world. You’re more open to failing and that’s about damnation. So vocations are saving us from ourselves by getting us to look beyond ourselves, by getting us to acknowledge there is something else much greater than ourselves. St. Paul said that widowhood is so they teach younger wives what to do, they pray more, they go to church more, on and on and on. We all have that kind of thing. So when we take up our cross, we’re taking up our vocation, we’re taking up our daily duties and we don’t recognize that because nobody talks about that. A cross is an instrument of salvation. Our vocation is an instrument of salvation. It’s our way of following in the footsteps of Jesus. What was his vocation? To save us from ourselves. And that’s what vocations do because once somebody has no vocation, you see them wandering aimlessly, doing illegal, immoral things, on and on and on, self-destructive. So the next time we wake up in the morning, the next time we look to our vocation, our spouse even, recognize that is God’s gift to us, that is our cross. It’s a gift, because that is ultimately the path to salvation for each one of us.

God bless you.