



LENT REFLECTIONS for the Marseille Chaplaincy with Aix-en-Provence and the Luberon.

This Lent I hope to produce a series of reflections on the Cross. I offer them to you as a little food for thought and hope that through them you will deepen your faith and your understanding of the significance of the Cross. If they don't help you then ignore them and find your own spiritual reading for Lent. I also commend to you WordPress.com who produce reflections on the Sunday lectionary readings each week. Check out their website <http://faithineurope.net>

Reflection 1. TAKE UP THY CROSS

Matthew 16:24-27 New International Version (NIV)

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

This passage of teaching from Jesus comes after Peter's confession in response to Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am?" and Peter in a moment of deep insight says "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

And before the transfiguration when Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah. Then God himself affirms Jesus saying, "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him."

Yet in the middle of these two moments of revelation about who Jesus is comes one of his most challenging statements. Jesus has been telling his disciples of his own forthcoming death which they seem neither to hear nor understand. We know that Jesus dies on a cross (the Romans cruellest means of execution) but as yet the disciples do not know this. So what must they have thought when he told them to take up their cross? They would certainly have seen condemned criminals staggering through the streets of Jerusalem on their way to execution forced to carry their own crosses. Quite an unforgettable and horrific sight. Something clearly visible and used by the Romans to deter other criminals. So what did Jesus mean? I think he is challenging his disciples to be serious about their faith in him, not to be secretive about it but to boldly proclaim it even to the point of dying for it. One cannot remain hidden when carrying a cross. People will see and make their own response to what they see.

If we are to be his disciples then we must be prepared to walk the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial and we must be prepared to be seen as Christians, not ashamed of our faith.

Questions to ponder:

- What does denying yourself mean for you?
- How far are you prepared to make your faith visible to others?
- Are you prepared to follow wherever Jesus leads you?

Next week we shall be going to explore the place of suffering in our faith.