

There is a story told of a civil rights worker
who lived in Georgia during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Obviously, this was not a popular position to hold
and he soon came under a lot of fire.

He turned to his brother, a prominent Georgian attorney for help.
He was shocked, however, when his brother refused to help him.

But what shocked him most is that he knew his brother was
a committed Christian.

He immediately challenged his brother's commitment
to which his brother responded:

"I follow Jesus to a point....

I follow him to the cross, but not on it.

I won't get myself crucified for any cause."

The civil right worker then looked at his attorney brother and said,
"Then you are not a follower of Jesus,
you are simply an admirer of his."

Now before we come down too hard on the attorney in that story,
I believe most of us can relate to that feeling.

There are times in our lives
when we want to do anything...but carry the cross.

There are times in our lives when our faith in Jesus is tested....
and nearly reaches the breaking point.

There are times when the full impact of Jesus' words:

"Pick up your cross and follow me"

there are times when those words hit us like a ton of bricks.

And I would imagine that there are times
when we are tempted to not pick up the cross.

It's hard for a young person to pick up the cross

When they feel left out and lonely and no one seems to understand them.

It's hard for a husband or wife to pick up the cross
when their spouse has been unfaithful.

It's hard for an aging person to pick up the cross
when they've just been told that their eyesight is so bad
they can't drive anymore or
that they can't care for themselves
and they have to move into a nursing home.

It's hard to pick up the cross when you know that with the cross
will come pain and ridicule.
There are times when the pain of the cross
seems just too much to bear.

So what do we do when that happens?
What do we do when the pain of the cross seems more than we can carry?

I think, first of all, we remember Jesus,
And we remember a time in his life when the pain of the cross
seemed more than he could bear.
And when that time came for him, what did he do?
He accepted help....
He accepted help from a stranger, Simon of Cyrene.

Think about that for a moment....
The son of God, the savior of the world, the messiah, the king....
the most powerful man in the world,
had to admit to himself and to the world,
that he needed help.

But, you know what? Jesus really didn't have to have help at all....
He could have worked some miracle to give him extra strength.
He could have held the cross up with one finger if he wanted.
But he didn't do that...why not?

Perhaps Jesus accepted help from Simon for a reason.
Maybe once again, Jesus was trying to show us the way.

When the crosses of our lives become too heavy,
Perhaps we should accept help as Jesus did.

Where do we turn to for that help?

Certainly we turn to Jesus himself;
He knows what it is like to feel the weight of a cross....
He knows what it's like to stumble and fall...
He knows what it's like to be humble enough to ask for help.

But we also need to turn to others as well:
To a spouse or to a friend; to a parent or a brother or sister;
to a coach or a teacher, a co-worker,
or even a health care professional.

Are there times when your cross seems too heavy to bear?

If the answer is yes, then today's Gospel has a challenge for us.
It challenges us to do what Jesus did.
It challenges us to do what the civil rights worker did.
It challenges us to be humble enough to seek out help.

But there is another challenge in the Gospel as well,
and it starts with this question:
How do we respond when someone reaches out to us for help?

Do we respond like Simon of Cyrene?
Do we help those who come to us in need?
Or do we respond like the Georgian attorney and refuse to get involved?

Do we help those who come to us in need or do we make excuses?

Take up your cross and follow me....
Words from Jesus that challenge us in two ways:
Being willing to ask for help,
and being willing help others.

After all, that's what being a follower of Jesus is really all about.