

This year for Sunday Mass we are in what is known as Year A of the cycle for Scripture readings which means that generally, especially during Ordinary Time, the Gospel reading will come from the Gospel of Matthew. When we look at the structure of this Gospel what do we see? Immediately after his initial preaching and the call of the first disciples Jesus goes up the mountain and gives us the Sermon on the Mount. Here he teaches about God's kingdom with authority.

After coming down the mountain he performs several miracles of healing; here he manifests the power of the kingdom of God. Here he shows that he possesses the authority of the kingdom of God.

Next he gathers his immediate band of disciples and he gives them authority and then sends them out. Go preach, heal and announce the kingdom of God. Here he shares the authority and the power of the kingdom of God. Today's Gospel comes from the end of that section. What does it mean to share, share intimately in the mission of Jesus, to share in his authority? Division: whoever loves family more than me is not worthy of me. The cross: whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

So it follows this pattern: Jesus teaches God's word with authority; his miracles of healing show the power of his authority and then he shares his authority with his disciples.

When we hear these words of Jesus, about not allowing our family to get in the way of our love for God, about carrying our cross, about losing our life they are such heavy words, a difficult message to take in and to live.

Father Ron Rolheiser is a Canadian Oblate priest, professor, and writer. He has a regular column in the Catholic Register. In one of his articles he reflects on the biblical word, "ponder." The Gospels tell us that often people were amazed with Jesus. He taught with authority, not like our scribes. They were amazed with his miracles; even the evil spirits obey him. But as Rolheiser writes,

“When we are amazed, we are not wise and we hold nothing together. In amazement, we fall prey to every kind of novelty, trick and one sided ideology. It is the antithesis of wisdom.

And the way of amazement is everywhere. We look at our sports heroes, celebrities and larger than life personalities. Wow, be my King! Be my Queen! But, when the amazement is gone and we have lost faith we call for their destruction. Crucify him! Crucify her!

The way of wisdom is the way of pondering, the way of holding every kind of pain, suffering, delight and contradiction long enough until it transforms us, gestates compassion within us and brings us to our knees in a thousand surrenders. “

One thing about this time of pandemic it has basically shut down the amazing in our lives. This past week should have been graduation week for so many of our young people. At a graduation ceremony how many times would you hear the word amazing? Amazing young people, amazing accomplishments, amazing future. Alas not this year and we all know that despite the effort the drive-by events and the virtual ceremonies don't cut it.

But hopefully the pandemic can come to our aid in pondering. The crowds were amazed at his words; the crowds were amazed with his miracles. The pandemic has been a time of suffering, anxiety, distress, pain. It is the time of the cross. But when Jesus says follow me he talks about the cross and losing one's life. These are words we need to ponder, hold within so that we will fall on our knees, surrender to Jesus and be transformed by him.