

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug. 29-30, 2020, Cycle A**

Many years ago Barbara Reed, a scripture scholar, had the privilege of listening to some indigenous women of La Paz, Bolivia, reflect on today's gospel passage from Matthew where Jesus calls on His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.

Those indigenous women of La Paz reflected:

We women identify strongly with the crucified Christ and His sufferings. There is a strong sense of submission in our Aymara and Quechua cultures. Women submit to sexual abuse from their fathers, uncles and husbands, with a strong sense of resignation, thinking that whatever suffering they endure, they do so silently and heroically, as their way of carrying the cross with Jesus.

Today, these women of La Paz would never say that their abusive treatment by men was carrying the cross with Jesus. Through a process of learning that the Bible does not call on them to endure abuse, but calls for an end to abusive violence, the indigenous women of La Paz came to see themselves as lovable; precious children of God who should never submit to abuse and injustice. These Bolivian women reasoned: How could Jesus, who was so intent on lifting up those who were bowed down, and on healing all who suffered, have meant it otherwise for them! Jesus, in his ministry, shows us that suffering that comes from abuse and injustice is to be resisted and eradicated as fully as possible.

Moreover, Jesus' saying about the denial of self is not referring to giving up certain pleasures, like foregoing chocolate during Lent. Rather, by self-denial, Jesus means a disciples' choice to take on Christ's way of life - to make Jesus' identity one's own. And Jesus' identity does not center on suffering for suffering's sake. Jesus identity is one centered on love of God; a love of God that is expressed through loving service of others in need!

Now, all will not welcome a manner of Christ-like living and loving that undermines systems that were built on domination or submission of others. This is where the cross comes in – the cross is a disciple's willingness to risk the repercussions for the sake of walking in the footsteps of the Master! To endure the arrows shot at us for living the truth, like the Prophet Jeremiah.

As for the women of La Paz, Bolivia, a newfound understanding of the Gospel was born in meetings in which they were able to join in solidarity to share their experiences and reflect together with new eyes on the Scriptures. From this grew their sense of being empowered, beloved by God and able together to confront and end the suffering they and others they love were enduring.

True to today's Gospel, these Bolivian women indeed found their lives, by selflessly walking in the footsteps of Jesus to end suffering for their sisters! What about us? Are we willing to walk faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus, serving those by raising the burden of suffering off their backs? Are we willing to lead a life centered on the love of God – that leads to risks for ourselves? – only each one of us can say!