All of us have turning points in our lives….Kids start school, go through puberty, graduate from school, get jobs or continue their education, young adults consider married life, single life, consecrated life, ordination, work life, middle agers ponder physical changes, career changes, family changes like “empty nesters”, seniors muse about more physical changes, retirement, and grandchildren to name just a few turning points in our lives. I’m sure I’ve missed others.

My wife and I have just come across a new turning point in our lives, the birth of our first grandson, Tyson James to our daughter and son-in-law. Mother, father and son are doing fine. The turning point for us is that it has been fourteen years since the birth of our last grandchild! We have to figure out new ways to be helpful to our daughter, son-in-law, and grandson because we are fourteen years older! We will do that with the complete joy that comes with the miracle of a birth of a child.

Our country faces a turning point on the question of race relations after the terrible murders in Charleston, South Carolina and continued violence between law enforcement personnel and young African-Americans.

The world faces a turning point as frightened people leave their country of birth and flee to other countries were there is hope of peace, work and dignity of life.

In today’s gospel passage from Mark we heard an account of the most critical turning-point in the public ministry of Jesus and the lives of his disciples. The stage is set by the seemingly innocent questions of Jesus about his identity. Peter speaks for all the disciples when he declares confidently, ”You are the Messiah.”

In view of the miracles of Jesus in Galilee that would seem to be an obvious conclusion. Jesus, however, is concerned by this answer because he does not want to give his disciples the false impression that he has come to lead them into a war of liberation from the Romans, one of the commonly held ideas by Jews about a Messiah. He warns “them not to tell anyone about him.” and the reason is immediately revealed: ”He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly…” The clear implication is that he is not a Messiah in the political sense that the disciples may
have understood. Jesus wants His disciples to know and understand that he came to suffer and die for our sins and rise on the third day to overcome death. Peter’s strong reaction and the rebuke by Jesus should be understood as a turning point when Peter and we, you and I are faced with one of the most difficult challenges in the life of a Christian, the need to move from a life guided by human wisdom to the acceptance of God's way of doing things. Jesus, always teaching, tells us the way to accomplish this is to, “…deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.”

Easier said than done! You mean I have to give up

   my need to be popular,
   my need for approval by others,
   my need for attention,
   my need to be perfect?

You mean I have to give up “stuff”? You mean I have to give up just thinking about me?

DENY OURSELVES!

   Take up our cross. We all have our own unique weaknesses, faults, or imperfections, such as a dependence on food, alcohol, power, greed, drugs, or sex to name a few. Some of the crosses we bear because we are human. Jesus knows we are not perfect.

He lived as a human being for thirty-three years, but he did say, “Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I recently read somewhere, I can’t remember where, these words, “Christian perfection is our ability to include, forgive and accept our imperfections.” Jesus didn’t say, “You can’t follow me, because you are not perfect.” He just said, “Follow me.” Turning points in our Christian lives such as being offered drugs by a “friend”, listening to a racially charged joke, or being blind to the refugee situation offer us the opportunity to follow Jesus or to deny him. Even with our imperfections and biases, our crosses, Jesus asks us to “Follow him.” Following him means getting to know him on a personal level, one to one.
There are several turning points coming up today and this week like

† The sign-ups for Small Church Communities, SCC’s, mentioned before Mass
† an ongoing Bible study that starts next week,
† the Right of Christian Initiation for Adults, RCIA, which is on going,
† Awakening the Faith, an invitation to Catholics to return to an active practice of their faith
† the second session of our Speaker Series, Restorative Justice on Tuesday
† and many more to numerous to mention.

Jesus, having lived in the human condition, knows we all have crosses to bear. To help us on our journey Jesus gave us the sacrament of the Eucharist to help when our crosses become too heavy, when we are in need of forgiveness, or when we feel the need to be in communion with our sisters and brothers as they carry their crosses. As you prepare for the Eucharist today you might spend a moment trying to feel God’s presence, feel his love for you, and know that like Simon, the Cyrenian who helped Jesus carry his cross, He will help you bear your crosses. Know that the Father is a merciful, loving and forgiving God.

FOLLOW HIM!