“If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

Our Lord says this to his disciples, and first of all to St. Peter, the head of the twelve.

St. Peter was inspired to say things on two occasions: the first time, if you remember just last Sunday, he made his great confession of Faith; he declares to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus says in reply, “it is not flesh and blood [your experience, your reason, or natural observations], it is my Father in heaven that has revealed this to you.”

So our Lord is telling us then that we can only understand the mystery of who He is by the power of God. Otherwise we begin to think that He is a great humanitarian, a virtuous man, a wise guru, etc.; or we can go to the other extreme and say that He is a demagogue or even a mad man.

But only God can inspire us to recognize that He is in Jesus of Nazareth, He is the Christ.

The second time Peter was inspired, we hear of today, was actually not a good one. Remember that there are a variety of spirits. There is only one Holy Spirit that leads us into all truth, but Satan, is a spirit too, a fallen angel, and leads us into a chaos of lies. He is always lying to us. He is like that little kid in the back of the classroom who is always talking and trying to confuse and distract the rest of the class while the teacher is trying to teach.

So to clarify, to make clear what God is doing in Christ: God comes into the world to save us from sin and death; this is the whole point of Jesus saying to the disciples that they must take up their crosses and follow Him. Jesus has already told them that He wants to go to Jerusalem, in verse 21. He has to go to Jerusalem, it is the will of His Father, that is why He has come to Earth, to go to Jerusalem and be crucified and one the third day be raised from the dead.

Up until this point, the disciples are still only listening at the level of human love, because when they hear the word “crucifixion” its like they go deaf; they do not listen to the rest of the sentence, “and be raised up.”

St. Peter is so moved that he takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him, “Never, Lord, no such thing shall happen to you.”

Remember, our Lord has just told St. Peter that he will be the first Pope. He will be the rock upon which the Church is now built and that the powers of hell will never overcome it; and Peter is rather full of himself, he actually begins to instruct his Savior!
This is always a danger in the Church, we become so full of ourselves that we begin to tell Jesus how to run His Church. There are many prominent Catholics in public life who pride themselves in being Catholics and yet love to tell the Pope how to be a Catholic.

So how does Our Lord respond to St. Peter? “Get back, Satan, you are a stone in my path, for these thoughts of your's are man's, and not God's.” If we only think at the level of human intelligence, then the Cross will never make sense, it will always be something to run away from.

Jesus is the Truth; and in the Cross we see reality with complete clarity. There are two beams, of course, of the Cross. There is the vertical beam and the horizontal beam. The vertical leads us to heaven, but if we only look to the vertical, then our heads will always be in the clouds and we will never be able to function. The horizontal beam is symbolic of this world; and yet if we only think horizontally, then we will only live life like animals. The two go together. It’s another example of the Catholic principal of “both…and” – both the horizontal and the vertical, both heaven and earth, which meet in the Cross [think of the Creed: we profess God to be the creator of heaven and earth; and in the Sanctus, we sign that both heaven and earth are full of the glory of the Lord of Hosts]. And it is at the Cross that we begin to see the meaning of the Word made Flesh, a Divine person with an earthly body; and when we see the Cross we begin to see ourselves, who we truly are, creatures possessing God’s image and likeness and made for Him. God has given us the Cross in order to reach to heaven, but we can only do that by embracing the tasks here and now before us. We can never attain heaven without the Cross.

There’s a funny story, a true story, about when Pope Benedict went to New York City in 2008 he offered Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral. All the people in the Cathedral had to go through metal detectors, even Mother Theresa’s sisters, the Missionaries of Charity. As one of the Missionaries of Charity went through the metal detector it went off. One of the security guards awkwardly asked her to step aside so that he could pass one of those wands over her and it went off too.

He said, “Sister, are you carrying a cellphone?” And she reached into her pocket and pulled out a crucifix. And she said, “This is my cellphone, I can talk to heaven on it for free.”

Sister was preaching this truth: Only while we are in this world, can we reach heaven, we must live in the horizontal to attain the vertical.

This is in contradiction to the current montras that we need to grow in “self-esteem and self-importance” or the declaration that “…I want to feel good about myself…”

Its only when we drop our false ideas about our independence that we grow in godliness.
And science always affirms the Truth of Christ. For example, psychology teaches us that the narcissistic person [grossly independent person] easily succumbs to all kinds of addiction. The ego-driven person thinks that they are the center of the universe and, that’s a lie, so that person has to fabricate an illusion. They do that with drugs, alcohol, sensual pleasures, all kinds of distractions...but its all living a lie.

There are popular evangelists out there who bring thousands and thousands of people together to listen to them. And these preachers tell them how to be happy, how to feel good about themselves, how to be successful...without a cross!

There’s a famous quote by a theologian who warns against those who present a kind of superficial Christianity, he said, “These people preach a God without wrath, who brings men without sin, into a kingdom without judgment, through the help of a Christ without a Cross.”

Our patron, St. Paul, urges us today to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God (again, both heaven and earth). The most tangible, “real life” way we do this is by praying the Mass. There really is no “intermission” at Mass. What do I mean by that? The offertory! It’s easy to overlook it, but the offertory is a moment of tremendous importance in the Mass! This is a particularly powerful moment for all of you, the holy and priestly people of God!

You, by virtue of your baptism, intercede for the world and offer sacrifice for the world. As the priest offers the sacrifice of Christ on the altar, you too, are meant to offer your own sacrifices and unite them to the Lord; you, the Body of Christ, uniting it to Christ, the Head. Our attitude must be: “I’m making of myself a living sacrifice to the Lord;” and you are also all ideally bringing an intention for the Mass, a particular intention that you are offering the Mass for.

While yes, the priest offers the Mass for a particular intention, and you can see those intentions listed in the bulletin; and if you want a Mass said for someone, you simply contact our parish office; however, the Mass because it is the same perfect sacrifice of Christ possesses infinite power and merit. Your specific intention might be for a particular family you might know or someone who has just died, whatever it might be, its important for us to formulate an intention as part of our preparation before Mass.

Of course we know that one of the precepts of the Church is that we are bound to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and to rest from servile labor. And I think this principal that we are supposed to come to Mass to offer ourselves as living sacrifices and to unite to the offering of Christ on the altar particular personal intentions gives a great “positive” approach to our duties and obligations as Catholics in regards to worship.
Even if we cannot receive Holy Communion, we pray the Mass in order to offer ourselves, offer intentions to God, and to intercede for the salvation of the world.

We know that this life is a period of training, of growing in holiness, which makes us ready to one day, pray God, to hear the welcome words: "Well done my good and faithful servant...come and share the joy of your Lord." Amen.