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 Take up the Cross
 

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From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matt 16:21-27)

When he announced to his parents that he would like to become a priest, his father rebuked him. "You are our only son, and someone has to keep our family name alive". When Jesus announced his plans about the journey to Jerusalem, Peter rebuked Him: "This shall never happen" (Matt 16:22).

### Temptation

We love to influence people in their decision-making. Parents do it for their children, superiors for their inferiors, and friends for their friends. We do it in a form of advice or opposition. We mean well. We want to help. We want to see others 'happy and successful'

in this life. We have in mind the "things of men".

During his temptation in the desert, Satan advised Jesus to use three different ways to become famous and powerful: changing stones into bread, jumping from the temple, and worshiping him instead of God (Matt 4:1-11). When his ministry caught the attention of many and crowds gathered around him, his own family thought that 'he is out of his mind' and came to take charge of him (Mark 3:21, 31-32). And when he was on his way to Jerusalem, passing through the villages of Galilee, some Pharisees advised him to run for his life, because Herod wanted to kill him (Luke 13:32-33). Yet, Jesus payed attention to none of them. His mind was set on the "things of

God”.

Such pieces of advice are very seductive, because they seem to make life “easy”. They offer shortcuts to worldly success and prosperity. They make us conform to the standards of this world. When a newly baptised Chinese Catholic met her Buddhist friend telling her about her newly found faith in Jesus, her friend told her: “How can you be so foolish? A religion that worships a crucified man will not bring you prosperity. Look at our Buddha, sitting with a smile and having a big belly. That is a religion you should believe in”. Such pieces of advice are also dangerous, because they oppose the plan that God has set for our lives. What would have happened if Jesus had listened to Peter’s rebuke and given up on his journey to Jerusalem?

Paul helps us not to get lost in our lives: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). By definition, a true Christian is a non-conformist. He or she makes their decision based on the will of God and not on conformity with the world.

### **Decision**

“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and let him follow me. For whoever wishes to keep his life safe, will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it. For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world at the penalty of the price of his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?” (Matthew 16:24-26).

Today, the world with many Christians and Churches included, shies away from the message of the Cross. Instead of “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me”, the false gospel of prosperity reigns, promising riches, fame, and power in this world to its followers. Was Jesus rich? Was Jesus a celebrity? Was Jesus powerful by our worldly standards? Paul said that ‘the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are

being saved it is the power of God’ (1 Cor 1:18). Sadly enough, the cross has become foolishness among many who call themselves Christians. We think that there can be resurrection without the cross. We want to ascend to heaven without entering Jerusalem. It cannot be done.

These days, crosses are being cut down from many churches in Zhejiang province, China. The removal takes about an hour, done with an electric saw and taken down by crane. Hopeless parishioners can only watch, weep, and pray seeing the crosses being taken down. Unlike many people in the West, they still know how important and meaningful the cross is. Smiling Buddha with a big belly may be attractive, but he cannot save the world. The wood of the cross is not an ordinary wood. It has special meaning perfectly captured by Good Friday liturgy: “Behold the cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world”.

When Peter rebuked Jesus for His words about the cross, he forgot who is the Master here. “Get behind me” and “follow me” is a clear indication of our place on this journey through life: not ahead of Jesus, but behind Him. He leads the way, we are meant to follow. So, let us stop arguing with Him. We are too small to grasp the mysterious plans of God. Let us humbly accept that it is through following the crucified Messiah that we can reach our goal in life.

### **Conclusion**

The way towards resurrection leads through the cross. There are no shortcuts. We are called to give up our lives for Jesus’ sake. Parents see Jesus in their children, teachers in their students, pastors in their flocks, and leaders in the people they serve. Cross means service and responsibility. Let us, then, stop shying away from service and responsibility we have been called to and boldly take up our cross. Let us say together with Paul: ‘I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20).

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Dear Lord Jesus,

lead the way and let me follow. Give me courage to take up my cross and follow you on the way to Jerusalem. Make me realize that there is no resurrection without the cross and no new life without dying to myself. Let me value the grace of salvation that comes from you more than the whole world. Amen.

### Prayer Intentions

- There are forty four arm conflicts in the world; Let us pray for peace in the world, particularly in the Middle East and Ukraine;
- Let us pray for the leaders of the Church; may God bless them with wisdom and courage;
- Let us pray for a group of Chinese lay leaders participating in spiritual retreat; may the Spirit of the Lord accompany them in their search for God's will;
- Let us pray for all those parents who consider abortion; may the Lord make them realize that life is precious;
- Let us pray for all those couples who want to and yet cannot have children; may the Lord make miracles in their lives and fulfill their dream of having a child;
- Let us pray for all who travel; may they, by the grace of God, safely reach their destinations;

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### Biblical Passages we all love

- “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. (Is 43:18-21)
- “Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles’? Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ or to a woman, ‘With what are you in labor? Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: “Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands? I made the earth and created man on it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host (Is 45:9-12)
- But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. (Is 49:14-16)

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### Spiritual Adoption

Adopt an unborn child. Pray daily one mystery of the holy rosary for nine months for one particular but unknown child that his or her life be spared abortion and be allowed to continue to live. Join millions of people who fight against the growing culture of death. All life is beautiful. Each life has right to live.

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**May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.**  
New Life Asia Team