

Here's a prayer attributed to NYFD Chaplain, Father Mychal Judge, considered the first casualty of 9/11:

*Lord, take me where You want me to go,
 let me meet who You want me to meet,
 tell me what You want me to say, and keep me out of Your Way. Amen.*

This strikes me as a deceptively simple prayer.

Same with the question Jesus asks in today's gospel,

when he inquires of the disciples: "Who do people say that I am?"

They rattle off some obvious answers – John the Baptist, Elijah or a prophet.

Then Jesus ups the ante: "But who do you say that I am?"

To which Peter promptly gives the "correct" answer;

or does he???

Peter says the right word. He calls Jesus "the Messiah" -- so far so good.

Jesus the Christ is the Messiah.

We confess that ourselves one way or another most every Sunday.

But what *kind* of Messiah is he?

Probably not what Peter -- or most of us -- had in mind.

Who wouldn't want a Messiah to swoop down and make it all better?

Make COVID go away.

Put things back the way we remember them (or at least the way we'd like them put back).

Whip us all into shape to "just get along"?

Jesus the Christ was sent by God not to be the Messiah we think we want, but the One God knows we need.

A Messiah who lives life in this world to the fullest –

full of integrity, compassion, righteousness, and most of all love.

Now that's a Messiah who's going to ruffle more than a few feathers.

That's a Messiah who just might undergo great suffering and

be rejected by the powers that be,

and by those of us who take those powers for granted.

That's a Messiah who just might get himself crucified.

Peter and the other disciples there don't want to hear that anymore than we do. Which is exactly why Jesus needs to spell it out for us all:

*If you want to be my follower, says Jesus,
deny yourself, take up your cross and then follow.
Those who want to save their life will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,
will save it.*

This is the first time the word "gospel" has appeared since the beginning of Mark.

By now Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

It's the first of three warnings of his death on the cross.

It occurs at about the midpoint, the center, of Mark's Gospel.

It should be at the center of our lives,
of who we are as Jesus' disciples.

Simple? Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us that following Jesus *is* simple. But it's *not easy*.

We can't know the deepest spiritual aspirations of everyone we call a hero from 9/11.

But we do know that they gave up their lives to save others.

The first-responders who ran up those smoky stairs in the World Trade Center while others ran down.

The folks who showed up to check on loved ones at the Pentagon, and served as impromptu stretcher-bearers . . . not knowing who or what they might find.

The passengers and crew of Flight 93 who had some inkling of what was happening on the ground, and who still voted – *voted*, God bless 'em – to stop the terrorists.

Did they know when they grabbed that beverage cart to charge down the aisle that they were picking up a cross?

God only knows what might have flashed through their minds in those last horrific, heroic moments.

But from our safe distance, with hearts filled with gratitude for their sacrifice, we can say they were following Jesus' example.

Whatever their own religious beliefs might be,
 they did what we as Christians *profess*.
 You have to ask yourself, *would I?* What would I do in such a situation?

God help us. God spare us ever having to face such extraordinary drama.
 But the thing is, most of the people who did the extraordinary things
 we remember from twenty years ago yesterday,
 were ordinary people.
 That's how the widow of Todd Beamer who led the charge on Flight 93
 described her husband.

That's how Father Mychal Judge's friends –
 even those who think he should be canonized – describe him too.
 "Everybody's priest," they say. "Any other guy."
 And, yet, you get the feeling that this wasn't the first time he'd
 denied himself on behalf of others.

There's that favorite prayer he was thought to pray most every day.
 That prepared him to be wherever God needed him,
 bearing a cross whether great or small.

We don't know what the future holds.
 (If we've learned nothing else these past eighteen months...)
 We may not even be aware of ways we might've denied ourselves
 to help others over the years.
 All we can do, now, is be ready. Be fearless. Be faithful.

Pray whatever it is that's your version of this simple prayer:
*Lord, take me where You want me to go,
 let me meet who You want me to meet,
 tell me what You want me to say,
 and keep me out of Your way.*

Amen.

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