

Fr. Emmanuel-Garet Ifeakor
Jeremiah 20: 7-9
Romans 12: 1-2
Matthew 16: 21-27

**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Louisville KY, USA
August 30, 2026

Theme: The challenges of living a Christian life.

(Singing) “Give me your grace to follow. Abundant grace to follow. Give me your grace to follow. Your grace is enough for me.” My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, challenge is seen as a difficult task. It is a situation that tests someone’s ability, strength, and skill. It is a difficult task in the sense that at times it puts your mental and physical ability into test. When we talk about challenges, we have challenges in every aspect of our life. Those could be seen in your job, your profession, education or in school or before you accomplish a task. At times, the processes of accomplishing a task are hard. Today, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” As I said before, in all we do, we do have challenges. Therefore, Christian life is not an exception. In fact, if you want to become a Christian, your challenge is more than the ordinary challenges you have in your life. Jesus says, “if you want to be one of my disciples, you take up your cross and follow me.” Now, during this time, the cross was a Roman instrument of public execution. It carries an image of shame. It carries an image of suffering. It carries an image of death. That’s why Jesus was crucified on the cross because they wanted Him to die a shameful death. So, symbolically, the cross entails suffering, pain, sickness, hard times, trials, tribulations, and struggles. Jesus was very clear when He was talking about those who would like to be His disciples. In fact, in the Book of Sirach 2: 1, it says, “If you have resolved to follow God or to serve God, prepare for trials”.

Hence, you were told before you became a Christian that becoming a Christian is not an easy job. In the first reading, Jeremiah had his own share of being a prophet of God. Many people were laughing at him. He said “All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.” Continuing, he said, “Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day.” Thus, Jeremiah was an object of laughter and mockery because he was called to be a prophet. I believe that so many

of you in your families, also where you do your job, in your profession, or wherever you gather that people have mocked you because you are a Catholic. People may have said all kinds of derogatory words to you just because you are following Christ. My dear people of God, when Jesus was talking about carrying our own cross and following Him, it entails that we encounter challenges in Christian life. Therefore, cross is not alien to Christianity. Cross is not accidental to Christianity. Cross is not incidental to Christianity. Cross is part and parcel of our life as Christians. What we have is like what is called an analgesic, like aspirin, which is meant to relieve your pain. So, when we come to Jesus with our crosses, He soothes and relieves us. Thus, His invitation in Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” So, when you come to Jesus, Jesus will offer you an “aspirin.” He offers that to relieve your pain, to give you the strength to continue to follow Him. There is no room in Christianity for cross less Christian.

You must have heard this, especially most of you that watch television or see preachers on the television, or people who come to preach to you saying something like “Oh, my God is a God of prosperity”, “My God is a rich God”, “My God is not a God of suffering”. Those that say my God is not a God of suffering, you could ask, please, was Christ crucified? When he or she says yes, you ask him or her again, where was Christ crucified? That is how to engage those who preach a prosperity gospel. They just wanted to attract gullible people or followers. They want a multitude of people by telling them what they would like to hear because ordinarily no one would want to suffer or have a hard time or want to struggle. So, those people present their God as a God of prosperity, and you follow them. However, St Paul wants you and me, in the second reading, not to model our life according to this age. The age that promises you when you come to church, all your problems will be solved. Jesus doesn’t promise you that all your problems will be solved. We are still in the world. In fact, one of the prayers that ends the rosary, Hail Holy Queen, captures this notion saying, that we are in the “valley of tears”.

Two more points before we conclude. Why did Jesus say, “you should carry your cross and follow me?” Jesus didn’t tell you to carry your cross and go before Him. Jesus didn’t tell you to carry your cross and walk beside Him. He said you carry your cross and follow Him. This entails that Jesus leads and when He leads, we follow. In John Chapter 4: 6, it says, “I am the way, the truth, and life.” So, when we are in our hard times, we don’t overtake Jesus. Some of you are experts in driving on the highways. When you go to the highway, you overtake people. No! You don’t overtake Jesus. When you overtake Jesus, you stumble because you don’t know the way. Jesus is leading and we are following. When you follow Jesus

in your struggles, hard times, sickness, pains and suffering, He directs us because He is the way. At times, we underestimate this concept of following Jesus. People want to go before Jesus. People want to work beside Jesus. Thereby, you will marshal out or depend on your own strategy, willpower and self-reliance to solve your problem. When you didn't solve your problem, you get frustrated and discouraged. We need grace to know that we should carry our own cross and follow Jesus, not overtake Him, not go before Him, and not walk beside Him.

The last one is, why should we carry our crosses and follow Jesus? This is because Jesus had been there. He was crucified on the cross. He carried His own cross. I will use a story to illustrate this point. There was a man who fell into a big pit/hole. He was crying for help saying, "please come and save me." The first person that came looked inside the pit and said, "I cannot help you." He left. The second person came and he was hearing the voice of this man saying, "please help me." He looked inside and said, "Oh, this is a big hole." He said to him, "Let me go and call a person that can help you." The second person left. The third person came and the man was still crying for help, saying, "Please help me. Please help me." The man looked inside the pit and jumped inside. The man said, "What? I was crying for help to bring me out of this pit and you jumped into the pit." He said, "calm down, I have been here before and I know how to bring you out from here." Thus, He was able to bring him out. Jesus had been here before. If you want your cross to be lighter, follow Jesus. Ask Him for grace to always follow Him. (singing) "Give me a grace to follow, abundant grace to follow. Give me grace to follow your graces and for me." The challenges of living a Christian life.