

The World Is a Monastery

Unfortunately, most people look to others like themselves to find out how well they are doing, with regard to their belief in God, or in Jesus Christ as God, the Messiah. No one else can judge us, or can ever be capable of judging us; only God, in Jesus Christ can judge what we should be and how well we are doing.

There seem to be various stages in a Christian life, showing how much a person understands, and has been able to accept, and become a responsible, sincere follower of Jesus Christ.

The first stage, as is shown when Jesus asked his disciples, what people were saying about him. He was told that they recognized him as a good teacher, a prophet, even as great as Elijah or John the Baptist. Nothing has changed. Many people see something good in Jesus; but don't understand that Jesus is God, the promised Messiah who saves us by helping us with grace to overcome our evil inclinations.

*“Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way **he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’** And they answered him, ‘John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets’.”* (Mark 8:27-28)

Many other people consider themselves faithful and good followers of Christ because they can say things like “I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior”. That is **a good beginning, but it's not enough**. If that's the best we can do, we still only have an immature understanding and faith in Jesus Christ.

*“He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘**You are the Messiah**’. And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said this all quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “**Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.**””* (Mark 8:29-33)

Many people give up on Jesus Christ, and say openly that it doesn't work, and no one can tell them that God loves them; because he didn't answer their prayer when they asked for

employment, a parole, obedient children, etc. This shows an immature, child's level of understanding. Suffering and trouble come to everyone, in different ways during our earthly existence. **Jesus Christ did not come to help us to escape all suffering and difficulty in life.** He came to help us, in his way of doing it, **to overcome**, and benefit from overcoming all suffering and evil, for ourselves and for others, in his way of taking up the cross with merciful, compassionate love for others always. We are called to do the same. If we do take up the cross daily, as he's called us to do, we improve and mature in our understanding, trust and love for God in Jesus Christ.

Being physically beyond a certain age, or having been a member of the Catholic Church for a number of years, is not enough to impress God, as being a mature and sincere follower of Jesus Christ.

“He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For 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.’” (Mark 8:34-35)

To take up the cross and follow Christ, in his way, means to always show selfless, compassionate love to those who need the help the most, regardless of what they did to make them suffer in prison, in poverty, with bad health, etc. **In merciful love** shown toward anyone and everyone, we are trying to help the ones who really need our help the most, without concern for what other people think about us; but only to please God. This is how **we not only show sincere faith and love for God, but also true love for our neighbor.**

We can even say that **in dealing with the suffering of others**, even though we are suffering ourselves, as Jesus Christ did while taking up a cross heavier than any we are ever called upon to take up, **we will grow more rapidly in our understanding, faith and love for God, love for ourselves, as well as love for our neighbor more than anything else we can do.**

This is what religious life is about. In the Catholic Church, **we call monks and nuns religious.** They are people who go to religious communities to be intense and serious followers of Jesus Christ. **Mercy love must always be part of their way of life** if they are to live in the intimate relationship with the family of God (Trinity) which they obtain, and enjoy, by being able to give their undivided attention, without worldly concerns and distractions, to study and prayer.

Possibly, people might believe that because they are ex-convicts, elderly, handicapped physically, or married, they may not be called to have an intense spiritual life, like monks and nuns. That is certainly not so. **Everyone is called to be holy. The whole world is a monastery** for those who find, and help Jesus, in the hungry, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless, and the stranger. Read Matthew 25:40.

God in Jesus Christ, in his wisdom, and by showing his merciful love for everyone, has made himself in every place and in every way, approachable, available, and obtainable to everyone from the poorest to the richest. If we will only take up the cross in the way of Jesus Christ, we will come into possession of the prize of life, God himself, and the treasure of heaven.

Where is everything spiritual we hunger for available to us? **In suffering.** Everyone must deal with suffering, at some time in life. We are surrounded by people who are suffering in one way or another. To take up the cross means to show **merciful love** to suffering people; and, if we do it in the way of Christ, the ones we look forward to help, are the very ones that most people avoid: the unborn, the destitute, the starving, the elderly, the homeless, the dying, the imprisoned, the mentally ill, etc.

We know and appreciate God best (God who is Love) when we receive his merciful love and forgiveness. He comes to us, lives in us, and we live in him, when we show merciful love to those who need our help the most, as Jesus did. We serve God best and show our faith and love for him most, when we please him by helping those who need our help the most in this world. They are easy to find. They are everywhere.

The poor as well as the rich are called to be holy, by being merciful. No one is poorer than Jesus Christ was. Everyone can be merciful, and those needing help are everywhere. People go to monasteries and convents to have the close and intimate relationship with God.

We may not be able to embrace the dedicated religious life of monks and nuns; but the world will become a monastery, for anyone who will take up the cross daily, in merciful love. Overcoming the suffering of others, with merciful love will make us holy; and reward us with everything spiritual, that anyone could hope to obtain in a monastery. So **the world is a monastery** for the mature and sincere follower of Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel always. Use words, if necessary.”

