

**22<sup>nd</sup> Sun A (2) Cross**

**Introduction...**

In the first reading from Jeremiah, the prophet speaks about how much he has suffered from following God's commands.

In the second reading Paul urges us not to be conformed to our age, but to be transformed, to know and to do *God's* will and follow *God's* ways.

In today's Gospel Jesus asks that his disciples carry their Cross and lose their lives for *his* sake.

What are these Scripture readings getting at?

They sound rather strange to modern ears.

What could these readings be about?

Let's take a look at that.

**Refrain... Give us a new heart Lord**

**I Modern World**

In our society today we are constantly told that we should have it our way. Life is about self-fulfillment.

If it feels good, do it.

Get your piece of the pie.

I might describe our culture in these words that attempt to describe how our hearts are cluttered...

Hearts *cluttered* by

Stuff, fluff

Ever multiplying wants

Flaunted in

Never ending commercials

Seducing our hearts

With steely spun webs

Of promised happiness.

Hearts *hardened* by

Insoluble problems of

Too many hollow hungry faces

Too many violence torn bodies

Too many crime afflicted victims



For one suffering person  
At a time.

No solutions Lord.  
Just compassion,  
From hearts transformed  
By Jesus.

**Refrain... Give us a new heart Lord**

**II Cultural Messages**

Listen to the repeated messages of our society:  
We are what we strive for... success  
We are what others say of us... popularity and celebrity status  
We are what we have... wealth and power  
We are what makes us happy... bigger and better consumer goods

We are the stories we tell...  
soap operas or the life-styles of the rich and famous.

Our society says:  
Blessed are the rich, the kingdom is yours  
Blessed are the well fed, you are satisfied  
Blessed are the powerful, you will inherit the land, or at least the mineral rights  
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for material well-being,  
entertainment and more *stuff*...  
the kingdom of *stuff* is yours.  
Blessed are those who compete and win, you wear the crown of victory.

I am not saying that riches are bad,  
or material well-being is evil –  
but I am asking if this is what life is about?  
What do we do with our material well-being,  
and with our many riches?  
Do we just look to our own benefit?  
Is it all about us?

There is an underside to our society, a darkness...  
Our society suffers from depression, stress related disorders,  
anger and resentments.

We spend billions a year on drugs to make us feel better,  
to give us some peace of mind,

and to relieve our anxiety and our anger.

Is this what life is all about?  
Is this the way God wants us to live?  
In the words of an old jazz song,  
*Is that all there is my friend?*

### **Refrain... Give us a new heart Lord**

### **III Jesus Teaching**

Now listen to Jesus' teaching:  
Blessed are the poor? ... You've got to be kidding!  
Blessed are the merciful? ... Show no mercy!  
Blessed are peacemakers? ... You'll be losers  
Blessed are the clean of heart? ... You'll be losers in the dirty game of life.

#### **Story:**

*At the Seattle Special Olympics a number of years ago  
nine contestants, all physical or mentally disabled, assembled at the  
starting line for the 100-yard dash.  
At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run  
to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the  
asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight  
heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned  
around and went back... every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome  
bent down and kissed him and said, "this will make it better." Then all link  
linked arms and walked together to the finish line.  
Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several  
minutes. People who were there are still telling the story.*

Why does this story touch our hearts?  
Because deep down most people intuit something beautiful in this story,  
something more important than winning.  
In our competitive culture, being # 1, and coming in first place...  
is what it's all about.

We pay our sports figures inordinate amounts of money to win...  
and very few can stand a loser.  
When it comes to living in the real world,  
this approach to life has taken hold of many people.

Our hearts have been seduced by such mindsets...  
Our hearts become hardened.

Then we hear the story about the race of the nine kids with handicaps - and we discover another truth about life...

What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves.  
What matters in this life is helping others to win,  
even if it means slowing down and changing our course.

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#### **IV Pick up Your Cross**

Jesus says "Pick up your cross," and "die to yourselves."

This challenge of Jesus is many layered.

The layer I'm talking about today deals with the Cross that we bear from living in our culture...

how our hearts can be seduced and hardened by commercialism,  
consumerism and materialism - the Kingdom of Stuff.

We have to die to this... or we lose our lives and are consumed by what we consume.

This is a cross we must bear.

This is the "old self" we must die to.

We need a heart transplant.

Or in the words of Paul in the second reading...

*Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.*

Another translation of this text puts it this way:

*So here's what I want you to do, God helping you.*

*Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering...*

*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.*

*Instead, fix your attention on God.*

*You'll be changed from the inside out.*

*Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.*

*Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

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**Conclusion...**

How can we carry this cross of our off-centered, self-gratifying culture?  
How can we die to this "old self" as St. Paul calls it?  
How can we get a heart transplant?  
How can our minds be "transformed?"

We are here in Church today as a Catholic community.  
We need to encourage each other to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.  
It's hard to do it alone.  
We need to encourage each other to be people of compassion and kindness,  
as was Jesus.

We also need to be people of prayer...  
our own private prayer each day,  
and this community prayer on Sunday.  
When we come here on Sunday morning we hopefully sense that something  
special is happening,  
something sacred is occurring...  
that something of our God is breaking thru into our lives.

This day we come to remember Jesus' great love for us as seen in his  
Passion when he carried the cross of our sin and overcame it with love and  
forgiveness.  
We ask Jesus to come to us in our communion today to give us spiritual  
nourishment, strength to walk in his footsteps and in the ways of God.  
Transform our hearts Lord. Transform our lives. Amen

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