Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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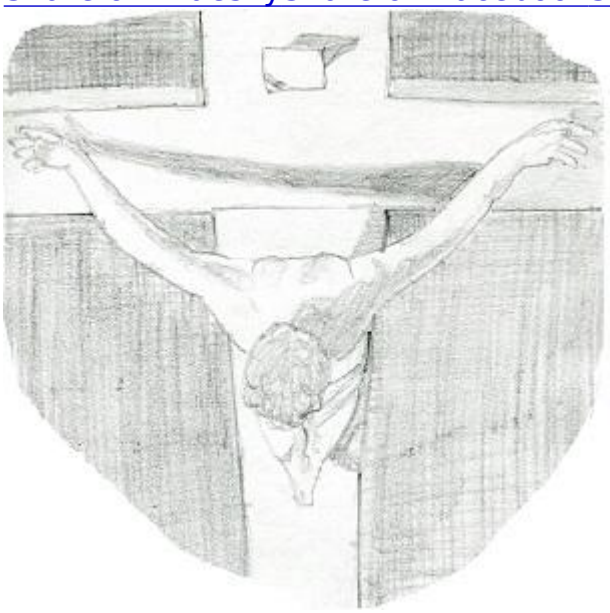

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Gn 11:1-9; *Mk 8:34—9:1*

Today’s first reading from Genesis 11 about the “Tower of Babel” was a tale from biblical prehistory meant to caution humans from entertaining any divine aspirations. The human race is dispersed geographically and linguistically by a jealous God for building a brick tower to connect earth to heaven. Think of the pride of place and technological prowess claimed by the tallest skyscraper in today’s world. “Is there anything we cannot do?” some boast.

Yet just 14 chapters later, in Genesis 28, Yahweh extends such a connection from heaven to earth as Jacob dreams of a ladder of ascending and descending angels. It is a sign of favor affirming the promise made to Abraham and his descendants of an unbroken covenant. The Gospel writer John sees the imagery as a foretelling of the Incarnation, for Jesus was himself the connection between divine and human and our “ladder” to heaven.

Today’s Gospel passage from Mark makes clear that the only way to heaven is to follow, or imitate, Jesus. And how do we do that? By taking up the burden of our lives, denying ourselves and living as Jesus did. Therefore, the ladder to heaven is the cross.

Our longing for God eventually confronts us with the need to get our shoulders underneath the particular responsibilities and opportunities our life presents. We cannot play it safe by refusing to live or by pretending to be self-made and independent of God’s direction. Jesus makes it clear that those who seek to save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives for his sake will save them.

Every cross will fit perfectly the person it is intended for, for it is the sum total of the circumstances, choices and influences that have made us who we are. The secret of life, quite simply, is to become your real self. No other cross will get you to heaven. Bearing your own with faith and submission will ensure that you are “lifted up” together with Jesus, in his sufferings and in his glory.