

The Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Fr. Trey Nelson

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (From Luke 9:22-25)

Every year on this day we read these words of Jesus. Yet, every year I am drawn back to the basic question of what they mean for me. How is this lesson, this standard of Christian living meant to be lived out in my daily life?

Does God want me to suffer?
Should I focus only on the pain in my life?
Is suffering the only way to happiness?

We all know the answers to such questions. It is not God's desire that we suffer. It is, however, God's will that we freely embrace a particular attitude about the cross. Here's one way to describe it: whatever pain we face, **it will not end us**. Whether it's the worst kind of pain, such as illness or the loss of someone we love, or the moments in which we encounter difficult people, it will **not** end us. So, we choose to bear it. We choose to look beyond it, because we know that this is not all that there is. We bear our crosses out of love, in response to God's asking us to do so, and because we remember all that has been done for us. But we also do it, because we know that something new lies beyond it.

Sometimes, however, we respond, relate, and behave as if the moment **will** end us. We encounter lesser, sometimes trivial issues, and we lose our temper, say things that we do not mean, and make poor choices in the heat of the moment: a difficult person, some interruption to my daily routine, a momentary, minimal inconvenience, and so on. We hit a minor bump in the road, lose sight of the things that really matter, and forget all that we've come through.

"Taking up our cross" is, in large part, about maintaining a sense of perspective. It's about remembering that nothing will end us, really. Life is not just about the cross. There is a resurrection side to all pain. This is the vision to which we are called.