

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Lord Upholds our Life (B)

Wisdom 2:12,17-20; Psalm 54:3-4,5,6-8; James 3:16—4:3; Mark 9:30-37

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Greetings of peace in the Lord Jesus!

Last Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus asked his disciples, "who do you say that I am?" It is a question of faith and seeks personal answer from his disciples. We continue to ponder the invitation to know our Lord Jesus this weekend, and humbly ask the grace to know him clearly, follow him closely, and love him dearly.

The Responsorial Psalm provides a simple answer to the question mentioned above. It says, "**The Lord upholds my life**" (Ps 54:6). The word "uphold" is composed of two words, "up and hold," which means maintaining good condition, or it could mean supporting, strengthening, and standing by. It is what Jesus did, does and will do to us. It is what we knew of him. This psalm is like a hinge that ties together all our readings this weekend.

Jesus upholds our lives because he is our Lord, Savior, Redeemer, the Good Shepherd. He is the Father's incredible gift to us, that from the moment his being conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary he was delivered into our hands. He became ours. Yes, he became ours, that for us and with us, he is our Lord and Savior, and we become his — his followers, faithful disciples, his presence to the world.

However, there are times that we fail to understand and follow him, like Peter and the rest of the disciples. There are times that our attitude and actions contradict to his way. But Jesus never fails to draw us to his way, truth and life. He upholds our life to draw us to himself.

How does Jesus upholds our life? Let us consider to ponder the following points which are related to each other.

First, he comes to where we are at. The Book of Wisdom pictures Jesus being tried by the wicked people. The evil men set against him, testing him if his words are trustworthy, reviling him to test his tenderness, and condemning him to death if God will defend and save him (cf. Ws 2:12-14). What a vicious plan and works, isn't it? But the ways of the wicked have no power over Jesus, nor do we find him getting even with these evil ways. He remained gentle and trusting to the Father. He is the perfect example of a person who has no selfish ambition, sown peace rather than fury, and cultivated love rather than hatred (cf. Js 3:16-18). He comes to where we are at, no matter what our circumstance is. There is no ugliness in life that he can't turn beautiful; there is no darkness that his light can't cast away; there is no tragedy of sin beyond redemption. He comes to uphold us, to sustain and stand by us!

Second, he heals and purifies our attitude in life. Notice, when he told his disciples that he would be delivered into the hands of men and suffered death, but in three days he will rise again, he was met with silence or, better still, avoidance. The disciples were scared to talk about dying and death, just like any of us. It is better to talk about position and honor, for it opens up the future than speaking of suffering and death because it limits a promising future. But the Lord Jesus patiently leads their minds to choose the value of the Kingdom of God by teaching them a lesson that has an enduring result. He said, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all. Whoever receives one child such as this in my name welcomes me, and whoever receives me receives not me but the one who sent me" (Mk. 9:35,37).

Humble service is essential to Jesus. It is an expression of his teaching of self-giving and undying love. He wants his disciples to locate positions and honor in humble service rather than the ambitious drive for recognition and status. St. James warns that such an ambitious drive will cause envy, jealousy, and unfair practice, eventually losing peace of mind (cf. Js 3:16-17). Our Lord draws them to enter the gentle and humble way he traced for them, which could be challenging but has healing and transforming effect in life. It is challenging because it shatters pride, and it is healing because it leads us to the heart of Jesus. It is appropriate to say that if you want to be healed from selfishness, take every opportunity to serve humbly. And if you desire to be cured of pride, start practicing welcoming the least and weak. It should be like our normal breathing — our ways to God in gratitude for his blessings to us.

I remember the story of a particular parishioner who served the parish family ministry; her husband died in a tragic car accident. She was around 40 years old when it happened. She had three young children to take care

of. I was wondering how she was going to survive. During the funeral wake service, I remember asking her, "do you have relatives and families to help you?" Her answer went beyond what I asked. She said, "Father, I know it would be difficult, but I trust that God will help me." Her exact words, "Mahirap po, pero bahala na ang Dios, Father." She mentioned that she has a small business, and she will try her best to make it grow for the sake of her children. Many years had passed, I met her and her children at one of the shopping malls. She looked fine, and her children were already grown up. After I greeted them with a casual greeting, "how are you?" She answered me with a response of faith. She said, "Sa awa nang Dios," that is, "with the mercy of God."

It's very humbling to hear her response. I don't know how she managed and kept her family together, but I believe it's the Lord who upholds her life. It is in the Lord where we draw our strength. Our Lord Jesus comes to where we are at to support and stand with us and grace us with tenderness. This is who he is to us, and we hope it is who we are to others.

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor