

Greetings to you! This weekend the Church of North India – Synod is having its 16th Meeting where members of the 27th Dioceses have gathered together to wait upon the Lord and to seek direction from him for the coming years. We are therefore called to pray for the Synod meetings, for all their deliberations, discussions and decisions so that God's name may be glorified.

We are also reminded through our theme "The way of the Cross" that we are called to follow the suffering Messiah who died for us on the cross so that our sins may be forgiven. In the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 53 the prophet reminds us that the Messiah took our pain and bore our suffering and yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. It is only through the way of the cross, the way of suffering, death and resurrection that Jesus was able to pave the way for our salvation. The cross was the only way through which God, being a just God could deal with sin in a just manner and set us free from the bondage to sin and death. Because of the resurrection of Jesus we know that sin has been dealt with and paid in full, Satan has been defeated and death has been overcome. This is what gives us tremendous encouragement.

In the gospel reading Jesus comes to the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciple, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" the disciples said that some consider him as John the Baptist, others as Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them directly, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus is amazed with Peter's answer and tells him that his confession of Jesus as Lord was not the work of human wisdom but a revelation by the Father in heaven. Jesus goes on to tell Peter that on him he would build his church. Peter becomes the foundation rock of the living church. Jesus also gives him authority to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in other words, making entrance to God's kingdom available or unavailable through their witness, preaching and their ministry.

Jesus then goes on to teach his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. When Peter heard this he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him saying that this shall never happen to you. Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Why was Jesus so harsh on Peter? If we examine closely the words of Peter echo the words of Satan when he tempted in the wilderness. Satan too tempted him to avoid the cross and to worship him and in return he would give Jesus power and authority. Similarly, Peter too wants Jesus to avoid the way of the cross. Peter cannot cope with the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah because he always thought of the Messiah as one who would rule with power and authority, and that he too would share in that power and glory. However, without the cross there is no hope of salvation.

Jesus goes on to teach his disciples saying, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves take up the cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." By saying this Jesus clearly indicates that the cross is the way for all his followers. There are no shortcuts for us. When we spend our lives for the sake of Jesus and the gospel then we will save it. If we are only preoccupied with our own lives then there is no hope for us. May we truly walk in the way of the cross keeping Jesus in focus, the author and perfecter of our faith.