

## HOMILY 24<sup>TH</sup> SUN OT YRB 2018

This week I have been thinking about 9-11 and all of the inspiring stories connected with that day. There was a man named Ron Fazio who was the Vice President of a company with offices on the 99<sup>th</sup> floor of Tower Two. When the plane slammed into Tower One, he made one of the best decisions of his life. He ordered all of his employees to evacuate the building. He rounded everyone up and stood there and held the stairway door making sure everyone in the company started down the stairs. They all made it down and so did he. Ron remained outside Tower Two helping others get out of the building. He remained there helping people until Tower Two collapsed. After the collapse, no one ever saw him again. He died helping others.

In the Gospel reading today Jesus asks the disciples a very important question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answers for the group: “You are the Christ.” That is another way to say you are the Messiah. Jesus tells them I am going to suffer greatly, be rejected by the elders, killed and be raised after three days. And if you want to follow me you have to take up your cross. You have to lose your life for my sake. Well, they did not like that. That is not the Messiah they were looking for. They were looking for the Messiah that would promise them splendor, military victory, a national revival and a restoration of Israel to its former glory. Most of the Jewish people at the time could not accept that. But those who became disciples eventually did.

Jesus poses this question to each of us today. Who do you say that I am? Do you believe that he is the Messiah? Do you believe that he is God, your Lord and Savior? That is the first step in becoming a disciple. That is the easy part. But if you want to be a disciple you have to take up your cross and follow him. You have to lose your life for him. That is the hard part. And if we are honest with ourselves, we really want the Messiah that is going to take care of us. Take away all of the suffering, challenges and pain in our lives so that we can live in total happiness today. Well, Jesus is going to do

that, but not today. What I just described is heaven and we have to give up our lives on this earth for Jesus.

No one lives a life free of suffering, challenges and pain in this life. If you know someone, I would like to meet them. Bad things happen in our lives and frequently we just do not know why. And when they do we can be faithful and carry the cross or we can refuse to do so. We can become a saint or we can just become bitter. Jesus demonstrates three characteristics that I think we need to be disciples. The first is compassion. Jesus reached out to all of the poor and vulnerable, those in need. He did not judge them or condemn them. He loved them and helped them. He treated everyone he met with great compassion and continues to do that today. We are called to do the same. Secondly, Jesus had the courage to put that compassion into practice. Acting on that compassion did not always make him popular. It was not always the socially acceptable thing to do. It was not always the best thing for himself personally. After all, it got him killed. But he had the courage to do it anyway. Third, Jesus always acted with calmness of spirit. Every time he made an important decision he prayed. He stayed connected to his Father and did his Father's will and there was calmness and peace knowing that he was doing the right thing. We can gain that calmness of spirit even in the midst of suffering, challenges and pain if we stay connected to God, knowing we are doing the right thing. He will help us. Compassion, courage and calmness of spirit.

In the 9-11 story I told earlier, Ron Fazio faced one of the biggest the challenges in his life with compassion, courage and calmness of spirit and he gave up his life in the process. When I first read the story I thought: "How sad that he lost his life in the process. How sad that he ended up losing" But did he lose? He is likely in heaven with God in heaven in total happiness. Looks like a win to me. We are all going to give up our lives in this world. None of us are going to live here forever. We can give up our lives for Jesus or we can give up our lives for something else. Your choice.