

Paradox of Life and Death Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Friday, August 5, 2016
8:15 AM Na 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7; **Mt 16:24-28** (Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major) (It's just letting go of something less good than what God wants to bestow upon us.)

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

At the core of the gospel there is this paradox that Jesus' teaching is lived out in many different ways—this paradox of life and death. **Life and death are not really opposites; they are two parts to one whole. So as we grow up we are always leaving something behind as we discover new dimensions of our own being. That's a sort of death.** A child dies to being an infant in order to be actually a child, child having more independence, more consciousness, surely more freedom than an infant. Then the childlikeness dies as a person becomes an adolescent, meaning a period of becoming adult. Again there is even more freedom, but then there are other things: physical spurts of growth that affect mind and emotions in unpredictable ways. All of this has to be dealt with; people have to learn how to deal with it. Some have very little trouble; some have a great deal of trouble. And many adolescents actually are very sad people because they miss the happiness of childhood. But there's no going back. **But they can learn that there is new life** in being an adolescent and there are good qualities and dimensions of adolescence that didn't exist in childhood. And of course then they have to leave adolescence behind in order to become adult. And that's just a few stages.

Then **this is repeated all the time in terms of our relationships, most especially our relation with God**, because when we relate to God **we cannot relate to God as someone self-created**. Much of what we do in the world is self-created. We develop personalities. We grow our own character. We develop careers and professions and occupations based on our own choices. But when we come to God we do not deal with God as someone who has really created

himself or herself. No, we have to give that up. **We have to give up in relation to God all that we have done and made of ourselves and created, and recognize that everything has come from God in the first place**, and our greatest and deepest identity is in God, an image and likeness of God, and our greatest abilities, our abilities to reflect the inner life of the Trinity, the love and the compassion and even the knowledge which St. John of the Cross says **makes us divine, divine by adoption**, but nonetheless divine.

This is **all a process of exchanging what we have been for what shall be**, what was, for what is. And it's all good; that is not bad. It's just **letting go of something less good than what God wants to bestow upon us**. And yet in this whole process there is a great deal of **pain**, especially when through our own **bad choices** we get mixed up in unfortunate situations or when **other peoples' bad choices** get us mixed up or when simply **our bodies or minds fail us**. All these things are part of life, and they are all part of this **paradox whereby letting go is welcoming something new**. Sometimes the process is long and the length itself is often something that is painful to endure. But this is the life that God has created us in and created for us which is us. **This is the life God has created us to be**. And so we continue because "whoever loses his life will find it, but whoever wishes to save his life will lose it." That's the paradox, and that's what we live out every day.