

You might have read or at least heard about the novel titled Quo Vadis. Originally written in Polish by Henryk Sienkiewicz. It has been translated in many languages and number of Hollywood movies made. The novel is based on a legend about Peter. At the time of the great persecution under Nero, the Christians of Rome told Peter to leave. "You're too valuable," they said. "Get out of town! Find your safety! Go to another place and preach the Gospel." Peter hastily hurried out of town as fast as he could. But as he was away from the Eternal City, he was met by Christ, going toward the city. Peter said to him in Latin, "Quo Vadis, Domine?" "Where are you going, Lord?" To which Jesus replied, "Back to Rome, to be crucified with my people. Where are you going, Peter?"

Peter's eyes filled with tears of remorse, as he turned and walked back to Rome, where, according to tradition, he was crucified head downward, feeling that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as had his Lord.

The story of Quo Vadis may be based on today's Gospel passage which tells us that Peter really tried to avoid cross and suffering. Just after Peter's confession and Jesus making him head of the church Jesus told them that he will have to suffer and die. Of course, it was too much for Peter and other disciples to bite. So, Peter protested. And because of his protest, Jesus even calls him Satan. Just a while ago Jesus had called him the rock. What a contrast.

Then after correcting Peter Jesus clearly outlines three conditions for Christian discipleship: a) deny yourself b) take up your cross and c) follow me.

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"

Denying oneself means to deny one's selfishness, self-centeredness, individualistic ego. Instead of I, me and myself we need to think I, God and others. It means surrendering one's life to God's service by serving others.

Carrying the cross means willingly accepting the pain involved in serving others sacrificially. It also means spending our time, talents, wealth, and health for others until it hurts us. Further, it includes our doing penance to make reparation for our sins and to grow in self-control. Carrying one's cross becomes easier and more meritorious when we accept life's crosses as loving gifts given by a loving Father. To take up one's cross is simply to be willing to pay any price for Christ's sake. It is the willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom for His sake.

"Follow Me" means the disciple should be ever ready to obey as Jesus directs him or her through his words in the Bible and through the teaching authority he instituted in the Church.

We may not understand the meaning and implications of carrying one's cross because we have not seen one. But the disciples of Jesus and other listeners very well understood the implication of carrying one's cross. Most of them might have seen it as crucifixion was the most favorite way of capital punishment given to non-Roman citizens like Jews. It was the most excruciating, most humiliating death. Hanging on the cross, naked on three nails for hours, sometimes days. Mocking and jeering by the passersby or spectators were part of the show. For the Romans, it was a kind free of entertainment. Crucifixions on a smaller scale were a common sight, and it has been estimated that perhaps some 30,000 occurred under Roman authority during the lifetime of Christ.

As true followers of Christ in modern time we must be willing to accept the cross to the extent the listeners of Jesus understood.

For a disciple of Christ to take up his cross is for him to be willing to start on a death march. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be willing, in His service, to suffer the indignities, the pain, and even the death of a condemned criminal.

On Aug. 21, Pastor Prasanna Kumar, 32, was attacked and brutally beaten by a mob of radical Hindus as he was returning home from a prayer meeting in another village. Later, talking to media he said "God gave me the grace to accept even death," "Scriptures were running through my mind as I was being attacked."

"I counted the costs of serving God when I came here," the injured pastor further told. add "A number of pastors in my region have been attacked, and some have even given up their lives for the sake of the Gospel. I don't mind suffering for the sake of the Gospel," he added

This is the type of discipleship Jesus is talking in today's Gospel.

How is your discipleship. Is it a discipleship of convenience and comfort? Do you want to follow Jesus only when it suits your convenience? Are you willing to come out of your comfort zones to follow Jesus?

Learn something from this Protestant pastor in India.

So, do you want to avoid suffering, inconvenience, and difficulties in following Jesus. As in the story of Quo Vadis are you running away from Eternal City of Heaven in fear of Crucifixion?

Jesus is asking all of us this Sunday the same question which he asked Peter, "Quo Vadis Mr. XYZ" How will you respond?