

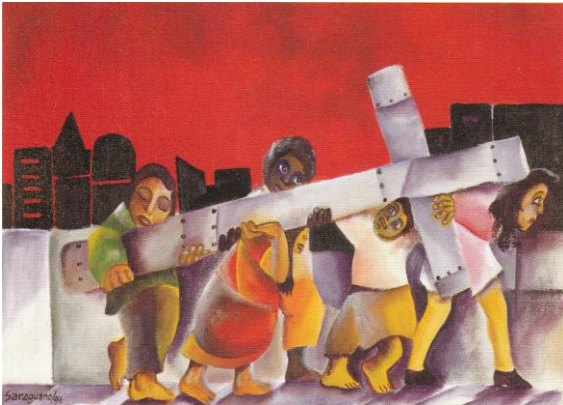
## Fifth Sunday in Lent

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**Psalm: 119:9-16**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Hebrews 5:5-14**

**Gospel: Mark 15:16-24**



I chose this painting to connect our reading from the Gospel of Simon of Cyrene helping to carry the cross of Jesus because it reminds me that often it is not one person that helps us, but many.

The story of Simon helping Jesus is contained in three gospels, but he helps because he is “compelled” to by the soldiers. Jesus has stumbled and due to the physical demands of the crucifixion needs assistance from a passerby or a member of the crowd.

This picture shows a group of people, all walking alongside and helping Jesus (who’s face is obscured by the cross). And it’s a community too – all the characters are different. I see the person leading almost dragging the cross along behind, the one on the other end doing it almost in their sleep, then one struggling under the weight and another simply holding it with his hands.

How often do we need help from others?

This morning Elen is with us from Spain. She’s a very fluent speaker in Spanish and Basque and while she does very well with English, it is not nearly as fluent as her native language. She requires assistance and guidance from Solema. How many of our congregation need help caring for our homes? Many of us find that the task is just too big or perhaps because time is short and there are other ‘more important’ tasks to be done. What about the preparation of meals and the assistance many of us receive in this way? Maybe it’s regular deliveries of meals on wheels or the occasional meal cooked by a member of the congregation to ‘help us out’. Even this last week, while I have been suffering with a cold, there have been things I haven’t been able to do and I have needed to rely on others for assistance. I couldn’t attend the ROW Programme and the Lenten Discussion Group, couldn’t attend the hospital to give communion or offer pastoral care, the list continues.

How often do we need help from others?

When I was growing up I was told that to ask others to help was somehow selfish and one needed to learn to be independent and do things for oneself. That message has ensured I have been able to achieve many things that I would not have been able to do if I had simply relied on others. But that message taken too far denies the help of others. How often do we stubbornly say, ‘I can do it!’ when we really could use another pair of hands or a listening ear.

How well do we receive help from others? Allowing others to help us raises many issues of dependence. Can we really place ourselves in the hands of another? What if they don’t really care for me? What if they don’t want to care for me but do it out of obligation? Personally, I struggle with allowing others to help me, to attend to my needs, but thank goodness you’re teaching me... and you’re all very patient! It’s an

important lesson for each of us to learn, because it leads us to the big question - how willing are we to allow Christ to care for us?

In learning to let others care for and help us, we are learning to allow Christ to care for and help us. The way of the Cross is not just the journey of Jesus to the cross, it is Jesus offering us one more lesson – how we can be more like him.

On our first Sunday of Lent, we were reminded that as Jesus stood arrested, he felt alone and ‘in the wilderness’. We feel like this at times too but Jesus tells us that he will always be there and we can find out comfort in God.

Our second Sunday in Lent reminded us that we too must take up our cross and stand up for justice in the world. We cannot ‘do a Pontious Pilate’ and wash our hands, pretend it’s not our concern or our fight.

The third Sunday, Jesus reminded us that we cannot do anything on our own, but we need God’s power. Jesus may have been able to carry the cross on his own, but he doesn’t. He stumbles and needs God’s power to achieve the end – and we need to rely on our faith in God’s promise that he will give us what we need.

Last Sunday, through the Pieta, Jesus showed the importance of relationship, courage and perseverance. The women in their care and attention of Christ’s body also remind us that our physical needs are as important as our spiritual needs. We cannot deny the physical, we are to nurture, care and listen to our bodies.

Our final lesson from Jesus this morning is that we need a community and we need people to help us. Independence is important, but more important is us appreciating the gift and generosity of others as they seek to help us. It is not selfish to ask for help... but it is selfish to take those who offer care to us for granted or not appreciate the gift of service they make to us.