

FEBRUARY 19, 2026 FATHER HAIG CHAHINIAN

My dear friends, it is such a joy to be with you once again as we enter this blessed season of Lent. And as we begin this journey towards the most holy period in our liturgical calendar, there is a beautiful parallel between the gospel that we just heard and this journey that we essentially just embarked on with our ashes.

But, before, let us set the scene and understand the context and everything that kind of led up to the gospel that we just heard today. I invite you all to open up your gospels to the ninth chapter. Such a beautiful journey, and we can understand all the emotions that went into this exact occurrence.

The ninth chapter begins with Christ giving authority to His apostles over all demons, and giving them authority and the ability to cure sickness. And He sends them off on to this mission to proclaim the good news. After that, we understand that Herod begins to worry, and he's hearing the murmur and the talk around Judea as to who this Jesus of Nazareth is. And then, of course, the apostles come back together with Christ and we have the scene of the feeding of the 5,000.

And after the feeding of the 5,000, and the miraculous period that the apostles went through, Christ sits down with the apostles, and it is at that point where Peter responds to Christ's question when Christ asks him, "Who do you think I am?" and he says, "You are truly the Messiah."

So let us understand everything that the— that the apostles have gone through up to this point. They have this authority. They're going around preaching the good news. They're curing the sick, casting away demons. They come back together with the Lord. This incredible miracle of feeding the 5,000 occurs. It's almost like there's this incredible

momentum and this energy, just the same way we feel at the beginning of Lent, having just received our ashes yesterday. We have our plan. We know the journey that we're about to embark on. We're going to try and make this period as holy as possible.

And then, what does Christ say to us today? Every single one of us joining for this Mass has heard this before, that Christ has instructed us to take upon our cross and follow Him. But what's very interesting, and a minute detail in that one word that we hear in the gospel of Luke from our Lord and saviour's mouth, is "We must not only take up our cross. We must take up our cross daily."

What does that mean? If we are taking upon our cross daily and following Him, that means we are put in front of a decision every single day. It's not this continuous weight. It's not this continuous journey of just having our cross, our struggles. Be it internal. Be it external. But it is a decision that our heavenly Father is putting in front of us.

Every single day when we wake up, we have the choice. Just as the evangelist says through the mouth of our Lord, we have the choice to deny ourselves and take up our cross. We have the choice to face the difficulties that we go through on our daily lives, and all different aspects. Be it in our personal lives, for our academics, watching younger students, high school, university students, our academic lives, our professional lives, our family lives, etcetera. Each and every single one of us have our difficulties that we go through, and every single day, we are asked, "Do we want to take this journey with the Lord?" "Do we want to really embark on this Lenten season with our heavenly Father, or would we rather take it alone, or would we rather ignore it all together?"

We have that choice. These words, when we read them, or we hear them for the first time, it seems kind of heavy. It seems as if Christ is telling

us it's going to be a terrible journey, because all there's going to be is difficulty. Is he truly saying these words out of love?

Authentic love, as we know, my dear friends, freely gets expressed and becomes reciprocal. Freedom allows us the opportunity to decide, to choose to take up that cross, to choose to sacrifice, to fast, to give alms, especially in this Lenten season. We have the opportunity to really offer our struggles, our pains, sometimes even our sickness. We know very well there are many that watch this daily Mass because of sickness, or physical inability to go to church. Even in those moments, even in that challenge, we are able to offer that cross and follow the Lord.

And let me conclude with this thought. Especially as we embark on this beautiful Lenten journey, of course our heavenly Father does tell us that those who lose their life for His sake will save it. But there is one other last thought to leave you with.

I'm fast forwarding a little bit. We know very well during our Lord's passion, as he's took up His most heavy cross, including all of our sins, a Simon was sent to help Him carry His cross. We are called every single day to, of course, carry our cross, but let me leave you with this last thought. Perhaps, today, we are also called while— while we are carrying our own cross, to be that Simon for someone else's cross.

And may we offer that burden, that weight, that struggle, that challenge, whatever it may be, to our heavenly Father out of love, authentic, pure, graceful love.

Amen.