We can imagine how St. Peter must have felt at the moment in the Gospel we just heard described. Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was. He was challenging His disciples to decide if they were convinced of His divine identity by the evidence He had given them. After some of the disciples offered opinions that missed the truth about Jesus, it was St. Peter who hit the nail on the head, when he said, "*You are the Christ.*" Although many people were getting it wrong, St. Peter got it right. He was not afraid to confess his faith in who Jesus really was – the long-awaited Savior sent by God.

But Peter must not have felt very confident for long, because almost immediately after getting it right about who Jesus was, he was rebuked and corrected by Christ for getting it very wrong about what Jesus was sent to do. The Gospel says that Jesus "*began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days*." At this, Peter took Jesus aside and tried to tell Him that He didn't need to suffer like that. But Jesus "*rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'*"

We can imagine how St. Peter must have felt. He was probably embarrassed, and maybe even a bit insulted, for being called "Satan" by Jesus. After all, he was just trying to convince Christ that He didn't need to suffer. But Jesus had a very important truth to teach His disciples, and all of us, and He had to be firm with Peter and correct him promptly when he resisted it. The truth Jesus was revealing is that redemption is accomplished by self-denial, and not by self-assertion or force.

The lesson for St. Peter, for the other disciples, and for all of us, is that it's not enough to believe in who Jesus *is*. That's the part that Peter got right. But that's not enough, to be a faithful Christian. It's also necessary to believe in what Jesus *says*, and that includes His great revelation that redemption is accomplished by self-denial and self-sacrifice, and not by self-assertion and force.

Jesus knew He was sent to redeem the world, and He knew that would happen by His acceptance of God the Father's plan for His life, which included His Passion and Crucifixion. Jesus knew He would be going up against the forces of

evil and darkness that had caused the Fall, and He knew He would conquer those forces of evil by obedience and love, not by violence or force. He knew He would fulfill the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that we heard in the first reading: "*I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.*"

St. Peter didn't want Jesus to suffer, but Jesus told Peter that if he resisted this teaching, he was thinking not as God does, but as human beings do. And then Jesus spoke the words that sum up what it means to be a Christian: "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.*"

What does it mean to lose your life for the sake of Christ? Well, first, it means to resist sin and to forfeit whatever experiences in life are sinful. It means to abstain from whatever is contrary to the teachings of Christ. It also means not to assert ourselves, not to insist on having opportunities for what we prefer to do with our lives, not to insist on what we think is owed to us, and not to go through life trying to maximize pleasure. To lose our lives for the sake of Christ means trusting that living as Christ taught will bring us a more abundant and meaningful life here and now, followed by eternal life later. It means believing our lives have been purchased by the blood of Christ and now belong to Him, who died to save us (cf. 1Pet 1:18-19). To lose our lives for the sake of Christ means to live them according to Christ's teaching of morality.

As St. Gregory the Great taught, the Christian life is about more than renouncing our possessions. It's also about renouncing ourselves. St. Gregory once wrote, "[Christ] tells us that we must renounce ourselves. Some may not find it difficult to abandon their possessions; but it is extremely difficult for us to abandon ourselves. Renouncing what we have is not so much; renouncing what we are amounts to a great deal."

This weekend, when our country observes the 20th anniversary of the terror attacks of September 11th, we are reminded what can happen when religious beliefs espouse force and violence, rather than the love and self-denial taught by Christ. And so we pray that the world, and all of us, will finally be convinced of the truth that whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for the sake of Christ and that of the gospel will save it, and save it for eternal life.