

You could entitle this gospel, "Jesus falls off bicycle." You know what to do when you fall off a bike, right? Get right back up. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. In the parish office we've got a grumpy cartoon that says, "If at first you don't succeed, give up. There's no use making a fool of yourself."

At the beginning of today's gospel, Jesus, so to speak, gets on a bike. Luke tells us, "he sets his face to go to Jerusalem." It's Jesus' greatest journey, the Tour de France of his life. You can almost hear him say, "The finish line will be tough, but pump up the tires--we're goin' for it." Then, the first stage turns tough; he pedals into Samaria. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. The locals reject him. Then James and John, two of the top disciples, get a great idea: "Let's call fire from heaven and wipe out those Samaritans." The Power Rangers approach to conflict resolution. Then Jesus meets potential followers, but they all have an excuse. "Following you sounds good, Jesus, but right now I'm busy." Sound familiar? So, you might say, Jesus falls off his bike. The Samaritans reject him; his best disciples advocate violence, and those who do show interest offer excuses instead. The road to Jerusalem will not be a triumphant ride up the Champs Élysées with a yellow jersey. It will be tough.

As they say, when you fall off a bike, the best thing to do is get back up. But it's easier said than done. Failure is hard to take. You make your best argument, and the family won't go along. You work to increase sales, and you still can't make a profit. Your marriage ends in divorce, and you swear you'll never love again. How in the world do you get back up on that bike? It's hard to courageously throw one leg over the saddle when that leg is bruised and courage is broken.

It's hard, but Jesus says, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." He sets his face for Jerusalem and does not look back. What gives him strength is faith. Faith does not fall to failure; faith is commitment to a cause. It's not like believing in leprechauns. It's like believing in your country, believing in yourself. If you're committed to Christ, you get back on the bike. Failure may slow down the journey, but it does not stop it. When we fail at family, job, or self, we don't look back. We get back up; we set our face for glory, for Jerusalem.