

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16: 21-27
Excerpts from Pope Francis - Angelus - 30 August 2020
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Brothers and sisters, today's Gospel passage is linked to last Sunday. After Peter, on behalf of the other disciples as well, has professed his faith in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, Jesus himself begins to speak to them about his Passion. As we heard, along the path to Jerusalem, he openly explains to his friends what awaits him at the end in the Holy City: he foretells the mystery of his death and Resurrection, of his humiliation and glory. Even more, he says that he will have to "suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (*Mt* 16:21).

But, of course, his words are not understood, because the disciples have a faith that is still immature and too closely tied to the mentality of this world (cf. *Rom* 12:2). They think of earthly victory, and therefore they do not understand the language of the cross. At the prospect that Jesus may fail and die on the cross, Peter himself protests and says to Him: "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you!". If we were at the place of Peter, wouldn't we be saying the same thing?

Just like Peter, we believe in Jesus. Like Peter, he has faith, we have faith, he believes in Jesus; we believe also. Peter wants to follow him, just like we do. But Peter does not accept that Jesus' glory will pass through the Passion. For Peter and the other disciples — but for us too! — the cross is an uncomfortable thing, the cross is a "stumbling block", whereas Jesus considers the "obstacle" escaping the cross, which would mean avoiding the Father's will, the mission that the Father has entrusted to him for our salvation.

For this reason, Jesus responds to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block, an obstacle to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men" (v. 23). Ten minutes earlier, Jesus had praised Peter. He had promised him he would be the foundation of his Church. Ten minutes later he says to him, "Satan". How can this be understood? It happens to us all! In moments of devotion, of fervour, of good will, of closeness to our neighbour, we look to Jesus and we go forward. However, in moments in which we approach the cross, we flee.

The devil, Satan — as Jesus says to Peter — tempts us. It is typical of the evil spirit, it is typical of the devil to make us stray from the cross, from the cross of Jesus. Addressing to everyone, Jesus adds: "If anyone wants to become my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (v. 24). In this way, he indicates the way of the true disciple, showing two attitudes.

The first is “to renounce oneself”, which does not mean a superficial change, but a conversion, a reversal of mentality and of values. The other attitude is taking up one’s own cross. It is not just a matter of patiently enduring daily tribulations, but of bearing with faith and responsibility that part of toil, and that part of suffering that the struggle against evil entails. The life of Christians is always a struggle. The Bible says that the life of Christians is a military undertaking: fighting against the evil spirit, fighting against Evil. Therefore, the task of “taking up the cross” becomes participating with Christ in the salvation of the world.

Considering this, let us make sure that the cross hanging on the wall at home, or that little one that we wear around our neck, is a sign of our wish to be united with Christ in lovingly serving our brothers and sisters, especially the most fragile. The cross is the holy sign of God’s Love, it is a sign of Jesus’ Sacrifice and is not to be reduced to a superstitious object or an ornamental necklace.

Each time we fix our eyes on the image of Christ crucified, let us contemplate that he, as the true Servant of the Lord, has accomplished his mission, giving life, spilling his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Let us not allow ourselves to be drawn to the other side by the temptation of the Evil One.

Therefore, if we want to be his disciples, we are called to imitate him, spending our life whole-heartedly out of love of God and neighbour.

May this eucharist help us not to retreat in the face of the trials and suffering but to witness the Gospel to all around us.