

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**September 3, 2023
Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

SCRIPTURES:

Jeremiah 20:7-9	God's word is like a fire within me.
Romans 12:1-2	Dedicate yourselves to God's will, even in your bodies.
Matthew 16:21-27	God's will comes before self-will.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

Matthew has just given us Peter's Great Confession: Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One of God. Now, he wants us to know what that really means! The kind of Christ that God wants Jesus to be is not the kind that the society of the time would have wanted. This Christ is the one who lays down his life for his people; he is the one who suffers for their salvation; he is the servant who would not accept worldly titles and honors.

Moreover, Matthew wants the Church leaders of his day (and of today) to know that they cannot be other than their Master. They, too, will suffer and die for the sake of their followers. They must be like Jesus in all things.

Jesus does not merely *teach*, as Mark would have it (Mark 8:31); in Matthew, he *shows*. It is a matter of revelation (See Revelation 1:1). The death and resurrection of Jesus do not just *happen*. The "must" is part of God's plan. That's the way it has to be because God wants it so.

A Messiah who does not suffer, die, and rise again in glory is not the Messiah of God! Matthew wants us to remember that *satan* has already been overcome by the refusal of Jesus in the Desert Temptations. That *satan* cannot be allowed to intrude his opposition to God yet again! How can that *satan* have any power now? Peter is called to reject that *satan* in his life and ministry just as Jesus did in his. The Church cannot ever again allow that *satan* to suggest any deviation from the paths which Jesus has traced.

"Get behind me, satan!" Translators today tell us that Jesus really said to Peter, *"Get in line behind me, Peter! Walk in my footsteps! All the way to the cross! And to resurrection!"*

Jesus asks us to lay down our lives. *Life* in the Greek text means *self*. The whole person must become involved with Jesus Christ, or it will be of no value at all. Matthew wants the Church leaders of his day to know that they have no advantage in choosing those things that would win them approval in the values that are being promoted in the world of the Jews or in the world of the Gentiles. Only in total self-surrender will the community find its way to the kingdom of God.

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah has every reason to complain about God's call: The call was so overpowering that it was more of a *deception* and *seduction* than an invitation. God has every right to use whatever means

will persuade the one whom God wants to call to service. If Jeremiah had known ahead of time what rejection he would have to endure at the hands of his people, he would never have responded favorably to God's call. Once he gave his consent, though, the word of the Lord is like *a fire within him*. There is an urgency about the message that cannot be resisted. It is as compelling as a carefully laid *seduction*. Who can resist the Lord when one is chosen?

Romans:

Therefore, at the very beginning of this passage, brings us to a conclusion of the whole argument that Paul has developed from Chapter 1 through Chapter 11! First, God has worked out our salvation in Christ Jesus, based on the whole history of salvation which began long ago. **Therefore**, the response of the Christian community has to be as follows: The life of a Christian has to be different because of what God has done for that person in Christ. The sacrifice we offer has to be *spiritual* as opposed to the sacrifices of dead animals in the past. *Spiritual* here means a *definitive commitment of the whole person*.

The power of God has brought about a real *metamorphosis* of the whole person for the followers of Christ. The inner image of Christ is the only test of the authenticity of the conversion that has been brought about in the life of the believer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways has the cross become so familiar that it is no longer a sign of suffering and of dying? Is it good that in America we have shied away from the bloody crosses and crucifixes that were part of the Spanish heritage? Can there be a dying that is not bloody and not painful?
2. Do you suppose that Peter resisted Jesus' version of messiahship because he had some intuitive knowledge that if Jesus was to suffer and died then he, too, would have to follow the same path? Is it true that we also tend to gloss over the sufferings of Jesus so that we will not have to face up to our own suffering and dying in his name?
3. Why does Jesus rebuke Peter in this Gospel? Does the rebuke apply in some way to the path that many of us have chosen in the Church today? How can we avoid the rebuke of Jesus in our lives? Can the Church community be so committed to the cross of Jesus that it will not even seek any worldly honors or prestige?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Each day this week, be on the alert for the many ways in which we have chosen to be *conformed to the world* rather than to be crucified with Christ on the cross! Make a list of the worldly values which have infiltrated themselves into our church practices.

PRAYER

**Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified Messiah,
strengthen me so that I may follow you
to the cross.**

(Romans 11:33-36)

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

To this very day, the Church still struggles with the choice it must make between being *conformed to the world* or being *conformed to Jesus Christ*.

All too easily, we assert that we are indeed conformed to Jesus Christ! A closer analysis will show that we are continually adopting worldly forms and worldly standards for the development and implementation of the Gospel. We become more like the civil society in which we live than like the community of faith which Jesus asks us to be. We imitate the structures of the world in which we live rather than transform those structures we find in place so that they will be more amenable to the work of building God's kingdom. When the Roman Empire fell, the Church took on the models of governance that had worked for the civil administration of the empire and adapted them to the internal government of the Church community. After all, Church leaders had become responsible for much of the civil administration which was in shambles when the Church found itself responsible for societal leadership along with ecclesial leadership.

In the Middle Ages, the Church took on a lot of the forms and ceremonies which attended the feudal organization of society. Bishops became *Lords* of the social order often with responsibility for civil affairs as well as for Church affairs. Some priests held the civil title of *monsignor* and carried the title over into Church business.

Today, we are often persuaded that the ideal form of Church government would again be the civil model: *democracy*. Those who resist this tendency often do so in the name of a more traditional model: *feudal autocracy*. The only thing to commend this latter model is that it is more ancient, not that it is more Gospel-based!

How can the Church find a style and model for its own internal government that is not so marked by the characteristics proper to civil society that it fails as an effective means for assuring Church order?

Jesus would have us take up the daily charge and responsibility for leading one another to the heavenly kingdom by *following in his footsteps, with the cross upon our shoulders!*

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