

Homily for 30th August 2020

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Do not conform yourself to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the Will of God...” Romans 12: 2. This line from today's second reading sums up and encapsulates what all of our readings today are trying to get across to us. We, all of us, have to struggle with living our lives according to the Will of God or of giving in to the way of the world.

Jeremiah, the great prophet who was active at the time of the Fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians laments his own role as prophet. True prophets are generally reluctant but feel nevertheless impelled to take up the role that costs them everything – all that they have, all that they are. So Jeremiah cries out to God “You duped me...” He seems to think that if he spoke what God wanted him to, the people would listen and take heed, but God never promised him that. Rather than heeding the Word of God the people ridicule Jeremiah, beat him and imprison him. Nevertheless, he cannot stop speaking the Word of God – it overwhelms him – “I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.”

In the short excerpt we have from Romans, it almost seems as if St. Paul has Jeremiah in mind as he says, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... do not conform yourselves to this world.” Some translations have it “this age” but the correct translation is “this world.” That is important to be aware of because the struggle between the things of the world and those of God are not restricted to any one age and are pretty much the same now as in the time of Jeremiah and the time of Paul.

What is particularly interesting here is that St. Paul also speaks of the “renewal of the *mind*.” Not the spirit, not the soul, but the mind. Man is a *thinking* creature and with the proper use of our mind – setting aside the temptations of the *world* we are able to “discern the Will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Simon Peter in today's Gospel is not discerning the Will of God but speaking as Man thinks and although only minutes before he has just been named Peter and entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, he is now harshly rebuked by Jesus, when saying that He should not suffer the Passion, “Get behind me, *Satan*, you are an obstacle to me.” This visceral reaction by Jesus, I believe, speaks to His own fears and trepidation about the forthcoming Passion. These doubts and fears on the part of our Lord in His human nature culminate in the agony of the Garden and are overcome by surrendering Himself entirely over to the Father – “Thy Will be done.”

Jesus builds on the moment: “You are not thinking as God does but as Man does.” And having predicted His own Passion which caused Peter's outburst, Jesus goes on to

instruct the disciples that they must likewise be prepared to suffer, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

For Christians the image of the Cross, either with the Corpus or not, is an image of Life, love and salvation. We have grown up with it, with Crosses hanging in our homes, crucifixes dangling on the end of our rosaries and the nicely sanitized crucifixions in our Churches have made us immune to the true horror of crucifixion. Because of this, it is almost a bromide for us to hear the injunction to take up our cross. Every little inconvenience or annoyance is a "cross" for us to bear.

This was not the case for the disciples and especially at the time of today's Gospel account. For them the Cross represented the most painful, shameful and horrific form of death that one could endure. So shameful was death by the Cross that it was illegal for a Roman citizen to be crucified. (Thus St. Paul was beheaded). There was nothing Jesus could have said to His disciples that could be more challenging than His injunction that they each take up their Cross. And He does this as an invitation, not as a command, "If you wish to come after me..."

This is then followed by words of comfort, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." And, "The Son of Man will come with His angels and He will repay all according to his conduct."

There is a battle being waged, one that is fought anew in every generation, between the powers of this world and those of Heaven. Gain in this world at the expense of what comes after is ultimately the greatest loss possible. Conforming ourselves to the will of God is the only way each and every one of us can fulfill his or her own destiny. The evil one seeks to lead us astray with the sensual lures and enticements of the world. What can seem to be in the instant a good of the world can in fact bring about irremediable loss. Living out our Faith can at times be difficult and is not without *worldly* cost. By opening ourselves up to the Lord, seeking to live out His holy commandments in our lives and how we live them, by frequenting the Sacraments, particularly Confession and Communion, we open ourselves up to the Power of the Love of Christ that will empower us to indeed take up whatever Cross comes our way, seeing us through Calvary to the Resurrection.