

Reflection for the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

The readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/083020.cfm>

1st Reading: *Jeremiah 20:7–9*

Jeremiah began as a prophet during the reform of King Josiah which he supported. After Josiah died the people returned to ignoring the law of God and worshipping false gods. Josiah prophesied against their apostasy but the people would have nothing to do with it and physically maltreated the prophet. The selection we have today is Jeremiah's looking back at his calling to be a prophet when he tried to argue that he was not capable of doing the job, but God called him anyway. Note that despite his sufferings for it, he could not be silent about God's will.

2nd Reading: *Romans 12:1–2*

In today's selection, Paul refers back to the previous section wherein he taught about how God is calling the gentiles to salvation along with the Israelites. He tells them that the proper response to that call is to make an offering of their very selves. This is the offering we make at Mass and live out in our day-to-day lives. Even though this reading was not particularly selected to go with the theme of the Mass, it fits amazingly well. (The Second Reading is chosen semi-continuously while the First Reading is chosen to go with the theme of the Mass.)

Gospel:

Matthew 16:21–27

God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.

I have a friend who is an action person. If he sees something wrong or something that needs to be fixed, or just something that needs to be done, he takes action and fixes the situation. He has a tremendous amount of energy that wears out people like me.

I followed him around once, while he was fixing a situation and I ran out of energy less than half way to solving the problem. I just wanted for us to sit down and think about it. I'm not sure I really cared whether the problem got solved or not, at least not at that point. Sometimes I'd rather think about something than actually do something about it.

Peter is like my friend, if he sees something wrong, he jumps in and fixes it. He let the Lord know that he wasn't going to let anything happen to him. And, John tells us that it was Peter who drew a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant when they came to arrest Jesus. (Jn 18:10)

In a way, Peter was playing God here. And, that's amazing because today's story occurs right after Peter's profession of faith that Jesus is "the Messiah, the son of the living God." Mt 16:16 I guess Peter wanted to be the messiah that saves the Messiah. Jesus is trying to teach the disciples

what that means, that he, to fulfill his messiahship, must suffer and die, and then be raised. But that wasn't the kind of messiah Peter wanted Jesus to be.

If, ultimately, Peter had his way, salvation would not have happened. It seems to me that Peter was suffering from a lack of trust in God, a lack of trust in Jesus. Salvation probably could have come to us Peter's way if he had been God. But that's not the way God chose. And, in spite of the ancient theological arguments of why the Son of God had to die to save us, I think it was because God wanted us to be saved by a human incarnation of himself and give meaning to human suffering.

I'm like Peter in that I don't like suffering. I don't like suffering myself and I don't like to see others suffer. But suffering is so much a part of human life. Some suffering is imposed on us by others but much suffering is just woven into the fabric of life. Suffering loss in life is probably the best example. We can try to avoid such suffering but if we do, we are also avoiding the fullness of life.

Think about it. Jesus could have said "I'm through with this" and tried to save us by simply uttering words. But that wouldn't have been true to who he is, the Messiah. To live out the truth of his life, he had to suffer human death which brought him resurrection and brought us salvation. That's who he is.

The message for us is that we need to embrace suffering in our own lives. We don't need to go looking for it but we need to face it head on. We can try to avoid it by using power, or wealth, or mind-numbing practices but if we do, we don't live the fullness of who we are. We don't grow

St. Paul said that Jesus "learned obedience from what he suffered." ^{Heb 5:8} I take that to mean obedience to the Father or obedience to life itself, which I think is the same thing. For the human Jesus, practicing that obedience had to take trust in the Father. We too, need to learn to trust God. If we do, we will definitely share in the resurrection.

Reflection:

"He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'" ^{Mt 16:23}

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/Share about your experience with someone whose differing viewpoint from yours prevented you from getting or doing what you wanted. In what area is your viewpoint different

from Biblical teaching? What would you need to change, about yourself, for you to accept that teaching?

Verse by Verse:

Mt 16:21: From that time on... | This phrase connects today's selection to that which came before it, the story of Peter's Confession that Jesus is the messiah. It also begins the journey to Jerusalem which will culminate in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Mt 16:21: ...he must go to Jerusalem... | Jerusalem is the center of religion for the Jewish people. It is where his saving act must be played out as the future, which he ushers in, begins from that center.

Mt 16:21: ...and on the third day be raised. | Being raised emphasizes that the resurrection is an act of God, not of the human personality of Jesus.

Mt 16:23:| ...Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle to me..." | Obstacles block a path. Jesus' path was toward Jerusalem. He is telling Peter to get out from in front of him and follow behind, as disciples are supposed to do. This understanding is strengthened by the fact that the next verses are the conditions of discipleship. Many translators concentrate on the strength of Peter being called Satan. I take it as Peter's actions being likened to the actions of Satan, a truth which should cause Peter to reflect.

Mt 16:23: "You are thinking not as God does but as human beings do." | This leads right into Jesus teaching about the demands of discipleship wherein he teaches that we must deny ourselves. I take denying ourselves to mean to stop thinking as human beings do.