

AUGUST 31, 2014 - 22nd SUNDAY in O.T.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again, you have to love Peter. He really represents humanity with all its beauty and its flaws. Last week Jesus told Peter that his profession of faith was inspired by God; today he is calling Peter "Satan" because he was "thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Jesus, in his own humanity, struggled with the path before him. On the night before he died, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked the Father that, if it were possible, the cup of suffering might be taken from him. But in the end, Jesus spoke the words that sum up the path to salvation: "Not my will, but yours, be done."

This is what Jesus means by telling us we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and lose our life for his sake. Being a follower of Jesus involves surrender to the Kingdom of God. St. Paul reiterates this message when he writes: "Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." In other words, we are called to think not as humans think, but as God does.

Here are some examples I have encountered just in the past week: I visited a parishioner who will be dying soon. His and his wife's great concern right now is that they are able to receive Communion frequently during his last days. Another parishioner is undergoing chemo, but she is full of hope because she knows people are praying for her.

I met with a young woman who had been terribly beaten by her husband; he then committed suicide. In talking with me, she was worried, not about herself, but about his soul going to hell and what prayers she could say for him.

I was called out one night this past week to the hospital because a mother was losing the twins she was carrying. She knew she needed a priest so that he could pray over her dying children who would be given the fullness of life in heaven.

I also visited two women from the parish who are now confined to a nursing home. They have accepted the necessity of that move, and promised to pray for all of us here at the parish. There is also a man who is dying of cancer; he is filled with hope because he has an unshakable faith in Christ's promise of resurrection.

I am sure many of you can tell similar stories about your, or someone else's, courage in the face of great hardship. In these situations we have a choice to make: Do we become angry or despondent, blaming God, or lashing out at others? Or, do we seek to be patient, accepting God's will, and try to bring something positive out of the situation by responding to God's grace?

I realize that this is not easy; sometimes it feels impossible. Perhaps at times we feel like the prophet Jeremiah: "You duped me Lord, and I allowed myself to be duped."

Jeremiah thought that when he responded to God's call to be a prophet, people would automatically listen to him and obey his divinely inspired words. But it didn't work out that way. Jeremiah was one of the most persecuted prophets in the Old Testament. Jeremiah considers remaining silent about the Lord, but then he says that "the word becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones."

In the challenges we face each day, in the difficulties and disappointments we encounter, each of us is given an opportunity to embrace the cross or run away from it. We can choose to be selfless or become self-centered. We can either surrender to God's will or cling to our own idea about the way things should be.

We need to remember the urgent plea of St. Paul: "Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, that you may discern what is the will of God." This age tells us to look out for ourselves as number one, to try to possess as much as possible, and to seek pleasure however we can find it. God's will, as Jesus teaches us, is to be generous and to help others, to be patient and willing to make sacrifices, to be persons of faith who trust in the power of God's grace and who have courage because of our hope of eternal life.

Do we try to think as God does or do we give in to the ways of the world? "What profit would there be to gain the whole world and lose our soul?"