

TWENTY-SECOND 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."

God's way of thinking, or the "Divine Pattern," as it has been called, is the Paschal Mystery: If you wish to save your life, you must lose it.

Life ... death ... rebirth is the pattern we see throughout the universe.

Stars die and planets are born from their dust.

A plant produces a seed, and the seed is then planted and dies, and then produces more plants.

God follows this pattern in sending the Son who takes on our human nature, suffers and dies, and then rises from the dead unleashing the power of the Holy Spirit.

As prevalent as it is, however, the Divine Pattern of the Paschal Mystery is not always easy to accept.

Jesus, in his humanity, struggled with the path before him.

On the night before he died, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he 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 the fullness of life: "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.

St. Paul puts it this way: "Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you may discern what is the will of God."

The wisdom of "this age" and so often 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?

Jesus asks us: "What profit would there be to gain the whole world and lose our soul?"

As I said, accepting the Divine Pattern 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 the most persecuted prophet in the Old Testament.

He considers remaining silent about the Lord, but then he describes how God's message "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.

That's why it's so important to immerse ourselves in prayer, the Scriptures, and the sacraments ...

... so that God can stoke into an enlightening and energizing blaze the fire of grace that the Spirit has planted within us.

"Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."