

3 September 2017 (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 62(63):2-6,8-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27.

Get behind me Satan!

How quickly the scene changes! Last week we heard Peter declare Jesus to be the Christ, Son of the living God, this week we hear Jesus telling Peter that he has now become a stumbling block to God's plans! Jesus told the disciples that his way of saving humanity was by going to Jerusalem, suffering at the hands of the chief priests and elders, die and rise again. This was certainly not the plan Peter had in mind when he declared Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of God! Perhaps Peter was still expecting that at some stage Jesus was going to organise himself into a great leader and take back the land of Israel from the hands of the Roman Empire.

Jesus knew that all prophets who rose speak the truth in God's name, were persecuted; some were even killed. He knew that if he kept criticising the Jewish leaders, he would most probably end in the same way. Jesus could have chosen to shut up and avoid any confrontation, instead he chose to continue speaking God's Truth.

Jesus rebukes Peter. The Hebrew term Satan is properly translated as accuser or adversary, someone who stands in the way, a stumbling block! Peter who has just recognised Jesus as the Christ is now trying to stop him from achieving his end. Jesus warns Peter to get in line; Peter's proper position is behind Jesus not in front of him. The role of the disciple is to follow the master, not to tell the master what he should or should not be doing.

Suffering, symbolised by the cross, is not something that can be avoided. The disciple of Jesus, like his master, needs to stand up for the truth, even if it means losing one's life. The image of carrying one's cross was not lost on the disciples; they had often seen criminals carrying their own cross to the place of crucifixion. When this gospel was being written, the Christians also had in front of them the image of Jesus carrying his own cross. It was not easy to choose to follow Jesus, and those who did follow Jesus found new life.

We are invited to be followers of Jesus, witnessing to the truth in a secular world that is often happy to make up its own truth. Even today, standing up for the truth is not an easy choice, but it is something the true disciple of Jesus is invited to do every day, at the cost of losing friends. The cost of discipleship is not easy, and one needs to take up one's cross and follow if one really wants to be a disciple.

Fr Mario