

Homily for Week 22A

In last Sunday's gospel we heard Peter acknowledging Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. For this he was commended by Jesus and all seemed wonderful. However, in today's gospel, following on from that, there is a sharp change of tone: for when Jesus tells Peter that He, the Christ, the one who was to deliver Israel from its enemies, must suffer grievously and be put to death, Peter was both shocked and alarmed, and remonstrated with Jesus, telling Him it must not happen. To which Jesus reacted sharply, almost brutally: "Get behind me Satan"; in other words, you are an obstacle in my path"; Peter an obstacle in Jesus' path? but just beforehand Jesus had said that Peter was the rock on which He would build his Church.

However all is not quite what it might seem at first sight. Jesus does not tell Peter to get lost, that he doesn't want to have anything more to do with him. What he says is 'Get behind me'. In other words, you are blocking my way but I still want you to follow me.

Jesus then explains what it means for someone to follow Him: he or she, must deny themselves and take up their cross daily. It is no accident that all our celebrations begin with the sign of the cross. In doing this we accept that the Cross is an essential part of our lives and that we embrace it. It is worth reminding ourselves, however, that without love the cross means nothing. Just as Jesus' suffering and death mean nothing without the love He has for us and for His Father, so ours means nothing if we are simply enduring it, like one would some physical test, unless the love of God and our neighbour underpins it.

Looking at ourselves and our lives, what are we called upon to suffer. What does denying ourselves and taking up our cross really mean? To suffer cruelly and die like Christ did? - possible but not likely, although we have to be ready for it; to offer our daily troubles and annoyances to Jesus, not to mention the burden of physical and mental decline? – yes indeed; But it means more than that. We have only to consider Jeremiah in our first reading. He suffered greatly in delivering God's message to his own people, a message they despised. For this he was mocked and ridiculed, laughed at, so much so that he wanted to throw in the towel. Today we have to be ready to speak God's truth in an alien culture, for

Christ commissioned us to preach the gospel to all nations. We can perhaps learn from the example of an American mother of teenage children who, she said, tried as best she could,

- To be a voice of unconditional love and acceptance in a world that is alien
- 2. to be a voice of morality in a world that tells them that casual sex is a normal cultural experience and that care for the poor is not their business
- 3. Who tried to counter the message her children were being told, namely that upholding Christian virtue is “not cool”, that it is irrelevant and a thing of the past.

We may not face identical challenges but we do, in our contact with the outside world, face similar ones. How do we measure up? Maybe not so well. Maybe reasonably well. Whatever the answer, let us not be discouraged by what seems a heavy burden and seek passing comforts. In this morning’s Divine Office reading, St Augustine reminds us that the burden of suffering is a light one because God, while allowing it, at the same time promises us His help. He doesn’t leave us to cope with it on our own.