

22nd S. in OT, Yr. A. **3-9-17** **The challenge of following Christ.**

Our readings today place a very challenging and confronting image before us, of what it means to be true as a follower of Christ, testing the very depths of what we believe in, and what, in our Baptism, we have promised to pursue.

We meet that challenge already in our first reading where the prophet Jeremiah accuses God of having been seduced by him. From the days of his childhood Jeremiah had come to believe in God's unconditional love for him. Words of election and promise kept reverberating in his mind: "I formed you in the womb..... I am with you to deliver you..... I will put my words into your mouth....., but all that he appeared to experience in return for his efforts to convince people of God's care and love for them, was ridicule, rejection and persecution.

Interested in doing their own thing, they had no interest in changing their self-serving ways, and would not countenance God, wanting them to become more thoughtful, caring and self-giving in their ways of life. Jeremiah experienced this rejection very painfully, and though, on the one hand he longed to live in trouble-free co-existence with his countrymen, on the other hand he felt a fire burning within him which rebelled at the abuse and injustices which were happening all around him, and in God's name, he could not but speak out against this mockery of genuine human living.

The Gospel picks that up, where Jesus foretells the physical suffering that lay ahead of him in Jerusalem at the hands of the Scribes, Pharisees and other powers that be. The Apostles don't understand what he is talking about, and Peter takes it upon himself to remonstrate with Jesus: "Surely, this cannot be." But Jesus pushes him aside with some of the harshest words we hear in the Gospel: "Get behind me Satan, you are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's

The trouble is that Peter and the other disciples were blinded by the popularity, which Jesus experienced from the crowds. They appreciated the miracles Jesus worked, as well as his teaching and care for the poor and other people who were abused and unjustly treated, but they failed to

notice the opposition that was building up from those who felt threatened by what Jesus said and did.

It is not so different from what the world is experiencing today, where we have developers facing off against those who want to stay things as they are, ecologists facing climate sceptics, pro-lifers facing abortionists and euthanasia advocates, traditionalists facing those who would urge us to accept same-sex marriage.

What we see Jesus doing in talking about the suffering he is to endure in Jerusalem, is to make Peter and all of us realise that by avoiding a confrontation with the powers aligned against him, that would be to admit defeat, - that the message he tried to share was not powerful enough to prove its truth.

And that could not be. In foretelling the suffering which was to come Jesus was teaching those who followed him that his integrity demanded that he would not hide from danger. He had to decide between being true to his message, - i.e. the message of God's love, that was entrusted to him by the Father, and to saving his skin. By accepting the first he left the second in his Father's care.

For us, it is that integrity of Jesus that is of paramount importance, for without it, his mission would have been a non-event, but with it, it is our salvation. It calls all of us, the whole of humanity, to a similar readiness to put ourselves on the line, - to recognise the truth and goodness of all that Jesus taught us by word and example, and make that love the yardstick of our life.

As I said at the beginning, this image that has been placed before us in these readings is both challenging and confronting, but for the good of the whole human family we need to follow Jesus in this, for it is on this that our future depends, both our human future, and our eternal future reward.

St. Paul expresses it well in our second reading, so let me use that to finish this homily.