

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 3rd SEPTEMBER 2017

-Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Matt 16:21-27)

Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself.

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said. 'This must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life?

'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Reflection

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It is radical, it is confronting, Matthew clearly puts before us the gap between Jesus' gruesome fate and our own modest discipleship. The verbs Jesus uses say it all! - deny the self, take up the cross, follow Christ, lose one's life, forfeit your life.

We are faced with the chasm between Jesus' call to discipleship and our own modest response, as sort of part time volunteers for the Gospel. Few of us, quite honestly, abandon everything for the Gospel. Most of us simply fit our Christianity into the vacant spaces of our calendar. But in this passage Jesus links the life of discipleship with his own path.

Reading some hagiographies of the saints, I get the impression that these holy persons saw that "to take up the cross" meant going around looking for crosses to bear. No, the logic of the kingdom does not have to do with plotting to spiritually succeed. Rather, disciples are called to obediently, constantly and humbly give of themselves for others, where hearing the words of Jesus and doing what these words imply are in conformity. Salvation comes not to those who call Jesus "Lord"- but to those who do what he says (7:2129) The true disciple is to walk Jesus' grim path.

Does Peter in this passage represent us all? At one moment he is all for following Jesus wherever (Matt 16:16)- "blessed are you Simon Jonah.", and then here Peter is hesitant, v23 "get behind me Satan." at one stage Peter is the rock, then he prevaricates. Is not this the pattern of behaviour for most believers, and that of the first hearers of the Gospel?

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1. Following Jesus calls us to a radically new way of life. It seems to be an all or nothing option.
2. True discipleship is about the unambiguous care we have for others, no matter what the cost.
3. There are times when we will fail, but are encouraged not give up- there is forgiveness offered us by Jesus.

Take home Message