

For Pete's Sake!

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 16:21-27

There is nothing like a little rough and tumble with Jesus.
Peter once again sticks his foot in his mouth—which is oddly reassuring.
He is the leader of the pack, which means that there is hope for us!

The exchange follows that between Jesus and Peter in which

- Peter's faith is praised by Jesus
- Peter is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven

“Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah...”

In *this* exchange, there is clearly a disturbing “shift of gears”.

Jesus goes from,

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

to

“Get behind me Satan.”

Did I miss something?

When you downshift like that, you take the car in for repairs.

What happened?

How did Peter fall from so high?

How did Peter lose the brilliance of his spiritual insight?

Jesus reveals something

- new
- unexpected
- truly only understood in faith

He is to “suffer greatly, “be killed”, and “on the third day be raised”.

The suffering and the killing did not compute with Peter,

who reacts and responds in understandably human terms:

“No such thing shall ever happen to you.”

A strong leader does not suffer defeat...

An *understandably* human reaction and response.

If so, why the outrageously strong reaction of Jesus?

“Get behind me Satan.”

A little over the top, is it not?

So, Peter doesn't fully get what Jesus is doing.

That doesn't exactly make him Satan.

Jesus' reaction expresses many things, amongst which are:

- His love
 - for the Father who sent Him
 - for those to whom He comes
- the loving necessity of His mission

Although Peter's reaction and response are understandably human, they are

- contrary to Jesus' mission
- manifests a total lack of spiritual insight, i.e. faith

Jesus comes to inundate humanity with divine love, and to inundate humanity with divine love in all those experiences that normally stop love.

To do so, Jesus passes through those experiences,

i.e. He suffers and dies.

To refuse this—as does Peter—is, in a sense, to refuse divine love.

Hence Jesus' intense reaction.

To refuse divine love is the work of the power of evil, Satan.

Jesus is not declaring that Peter is Satan,

but that his refusal—albeit innocent—is akin to the one who is anti-love.

All of this is really only understood in faith, i.e. God Himself granting us insight. It makes little sense otherwise: suffering and death are humanly bad.

Jesus then proceeds to articulate the repercussions of His mission in the lives of His followers, for His friends.

It follows that these too make little sense outside of faith.

One who belongs to Jesus must

- deny him/herself
- take up his/her cross
- follow Jesus

It is not exactly what Dr. Phil recommends.

It is actually quite simple, however.

The focus, Jesus says, is God.

If God is

- Supreme Being
- Source of all love
- my Creator

and Jesus is God incarnate, come to inundate us with divine love

in all the messiness of our lives,

then we enter into divine intimacy by letting go, by surrendering.

Jesus is not a proponent of self-hatred and Stoic resolution in suffering.

Jesus invites

- shift in focus to God
- trusting surrender to God
- openness to God in the midst of suffering

When Jesus says, “Take up your cross”,

He is not saying, “You will have your share of suffering, deal with it.”

Rather He is saying, “Let me love you in your suffering,

i.e. let the mystery of *the* Cross, *my* Cross, the only cross that is loving and redemptive, touch you.

In trusting surrender to Him, we find our lives, for we allow the One who is life, who is *our* life, to fill and transform us, and take us to new heights.

If we cling to our lives like Hollywood so often recommends, we lose them.

They become a closed circuit.

Stardom eventually comes crashing...

Again, all of this is really only understood in faith,

i.e. with the spiritual insight that God Himself grants us.

We must ask for such insight everyday.

Paul strongly recommends it in the 2nd reading:

“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern.” (Romans 12:2)

Otherwise, we can crash like Peter.

We fall into Hollywood thinking, i.e. that we are here to gain the whole world.

No: we are here to be inundated with divine love, and led home to the heart of God.

We are to enjoy the world along the way, but with the freedom of the children of God, which comes only with trusting surrender, open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In receiving Jesus in the Eucharist,

- let us be found
- let find ourselves in God...