

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time A - God's Ways Are Not Our Ways

August 30, 2026.

Boy, Peter sure got told off this Sunday." Get behind me Satan." It didn't take Peter long to fall off the pedestal Jesus put him on. This Gospel passage (Matthew 16:21-27) comes immediately after last Sunday's Gospel when Jesus called Peter the Rock upon which He will build His Church and have the keys to guard the gate to heaven. But now in this passage that follows, Jesus calls Peter Satan. Indeed, he is acting in the role of Satan by trying to dissuade Jesus from his awful course. It is the same Satan who appears in the desert and tempted Jesus to renounce his mission. Peter fell because he did not know the "messianic secret" - that the way Jesus will achieve our salvation will be far different from what generations of faithful Jews have expected. He will not be a conquering warrior in any traditional sense. He will not restore the kings of Israel by conquering Israel's enemies. Instead, he will die for his people. He will conquer death itself and he will do so to save all nations. Full understanding for the apostles will not come until they see the empty tomb. Their thinking is not the way God thinks. They lack wisdom. Their way and our way of thinking is of the world. The world would tell us, "Save your life. Don't let anyone kill you." The way of the Lord would be, "Make the sacrificial love of God real. Sacrifice yourself for others." It is easy for us to think the way the world thinks. Everything around us tells us to take, not give, to be concerned about ourselves first and others second, or third or fourth. Fit God in somewhere, if you care. That is the thought process of the world. People say "Times have changed, I'm only doing what is perfectly acceptable by our society." Or, "Everybody have the right to follow their own opinion, my body is mine and I can do what I want and nobody can tell me what to do." People do not think their opinion and action have effects on their society. And so, with these words, some people chose MAID (Medical Assistance In Dying), young people justified their "wild" lifestyle, and the abusers justified their actions. And on and on. Add in whatever immoral behaviour you can think of, and someone will say, "I'm only doing what is perfectly acceptable by society."

But what society is that? In what society is immorality acceptable? It is acceptable by the society that finds nothing wrong with hedonism, putting one's pleasure before every other good in life, including respect for others, respect for country, respect for life. What is the society that so many claim for themselves? It is the society that is at best amoral, but which is mostly immoral. It is the society that is at best pagan, but mostly atheistic. When a person hides his or her immoral behaviour behind the "acceptable by our society" argument, that person is invoking the society that St. Paul calls "this age," or, "the pattern of the world." This is the world that Jesus Christ came to save. It is the world of selfishness, a world of pride, a world where God is not wanted. St. Paul says in the second reading (Rom. 12:1-2): "I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship...Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." We were joined to a new world when we were baptized. Each of us is a key part of the Kingdom of God. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of people in each of our lives who look to us to illuminate their darkness with the Light of Christ. The problem is that we can easily be enticed by all that is around us. We can easily reject all that is within us. And so, we often straddle major issues in life. "I didn't know Christianity would be this difficult," Yes, to live a Christian life with sincerity involves suffering and sacrifice. The prophet Jeremiah cried out to the Lord (Jer 20: 7-9), "O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me..." Jeremiah suffers greatly in his life, yet he can endure his pain far more easily than he can resist the summons to speak on God's behalf. That's what discipleship is all about since the Old Testament time, since Jesus' time and the martyrs through the centuries until even now, the persecuted Christians throughout the world continue to show us.

We don't embrace Christianity for high theological reasons or arguments. We embrace Jesus Christ for one reason only: we are wounded by His Love. That's from an Irish saint, St. Columban: "Show me my heart's desire, O Lord, for I am wounded by your love." Men of God, women of God, we have been wounded by Love. When we made the conscious choice of Jesus Christ, we set out on a course of action that does not allow turning back. But we don't care. We are wounded by His Love. And we love it. He is within us, burning out for us to proclaim his presence. Even if we wanted to ignore Him, we can't. We are his. "O Lord, better is one day in your house, than a thousand elsewhere." (Psalm 84). And "My soul thirst for you, my flesh faints for you...your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you...my soul clings to you..." (Psalm 63). Very often, we, like Peter, have an "immature" faith wanting a Messiah of triumph and not a Messiah who suffered. We fall into the trap of wanting a comfortable faith without sacrifice. The true path of discipleship is to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Losing one's life for Christ's sake means moving away from a selfish life and choosing a life of love, service, and self-surrender. To be a true disciple is more than giving God forty minutes on Sunday morning, dressing up nicely, sitting in the comfort of the pews. Our earthly pilgrimage is full of trials and tribulations. We all experience hardship in the form of sickness, loss of job or death in the family. When things go wrong and affliction comes our way we cry out and protest in bitter rebellion. Satan is always lurking around the corner trying to persuade us that we'll be free from suffering if we run away from God. But running away from pain can never bring joy. So, we must cling to God because His love is better than life and one day in His court is better than a thousand elsewhere. Being a Christian is a demanding honour because God's ways are not our ways.