

Get Behind Me, Satan
09/03/17

Just in case you missed last week's Gospel, let me remind you Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying the Son of Man was? They responded that some were saying John the Baptist, some Elijah, others one of the prophets. Then Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon tells Jesus He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus says to Simon, "Good answer!" Because you answered correctly, you will no longer be Simon but Peter and upon this rock, this Petra, Jesus will build His church. A+ for Peter. Gold star for Peter. Fast forward to this week's Gospel.

For the first time in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus predicts His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Peter pulls Jesus aside and in effect says, "Whoa there, Jesus. We are NOT going to allow that to happen to you. You have a whole nation to save. You have an entire people to free from the grip of the Romans. I will do everything I can to save you from a fate such as you describe." And what happens to this rock, this Petra? Jesus calls him Satan. Satan of all the names He could come up with.

As one author suggests Peter has revealed he doesn't understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is. Peter wants a Messiah who will achieve victory without any suffering. And just as so often happens with us, we are tempted to take the easy way and choose our own comfort or convenience over the needs of others. It's easier because it conforms to the ways of the world.

Ah, but this Messiah, this Jesus, calls us to swim against the current of culture. He says that if we want to be His followers, we must take up the cross. Which means taking up a selfless and self-sacrificing way of life. You see, our culture tells us look out for ourselves, whereas Jesus tells us to look out for others, even when that means personal inconvenience, or even suffering. St. Paul reminds us that as Christians, we are called to be conformed to Christ, not to our or any culture.

St. Mother Teresa began her ministry to the poor after a vivid experience of God set her on the path, yet she never had such an experience again. She carried out her daily ministry feeling the absence

of God. She could relate in many ways to Jeremiah's complaint – first a sense of attraction, then a sense of abandonment. Yet, just like Jeremiah, she did not back away. She continued to trust and she continued to love.

Msgr. Ralph Kuehner suggests that Jesus must have been a passionate person; knowing a journey to Jerusalem was a journey to His death, Jesus went forward anyway. This sounds similar to the stories of Jeremiah and St. Mother Teresa and so many others. Jesus continued His journey to Jerusalem not because He wished to die but because the passion of His vision, His dream of God's kingdom in our midst, would not allow Him to keep silent or do otherwise.

Msgr. Kuehner concludes by reminding us that ever since, one's passion for the dream that became real when Jesus became human is now the measure of one's discipleship. Whenever or wherever that passion rises up out of one's faith, it carries that person to a fuller life.

One of my all-time favorite movies is the Wizard of Oz. I have watched it countless times and know virtually all the lines. One author suggests that the cowardly lion put all his hopes in the wizard to help him find the courage he lacked. However, the wizard didn't give him the courage – it was there all the time. The cowardly lion found enough courage to help Dorothy in the wicked witch's castle and when it comes right down to it, we sometimes don't realize we have the skills necessary to make a difference in the lives of others.

Jeremiah and St. Teresa and Jesus were urged to do things they wished they could avoid doing. Yet all three took up their crosses, Jesus in a very real sense, and found the courage to say and do God's bidding, to do what God had planned all along for them. What is God urging you to do?