

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, August 30, 2020

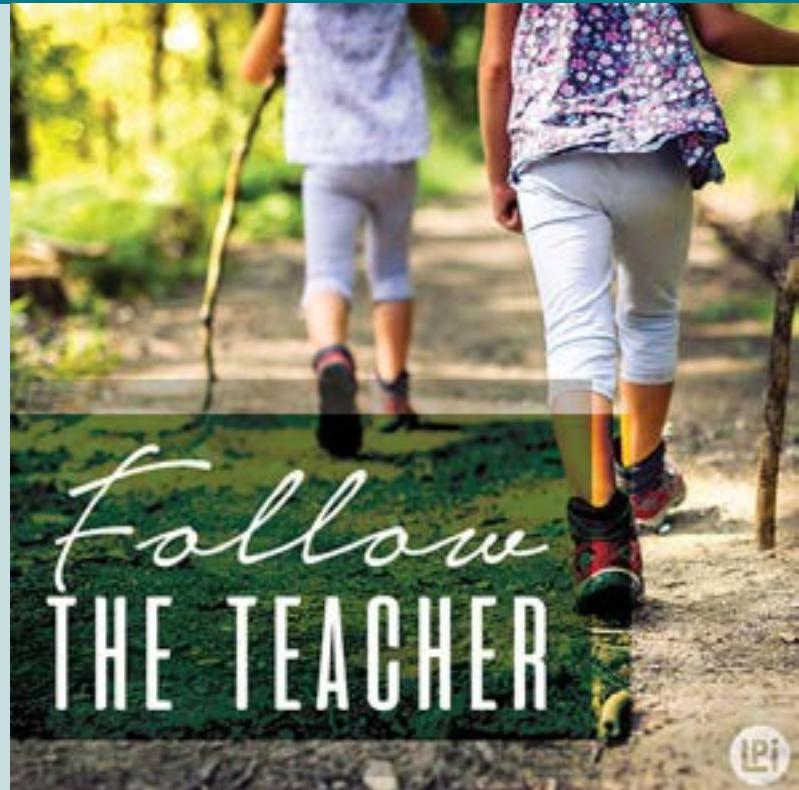
The Good News Of Discipleship

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27



"Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." —Matthew 16:21

Recently, I had the opportunity to take part in a program with ordained and lay ministers representing a number of Christian traditions and nationalities. Although we spent a lot of time working as a large group, at times we were divided into smaller groups for guided discussion.

Within my small group, we discussed the reality of evil in the world and how each of us understood grace and salvation. Taking part in the conversation were Catholics and Lutherans from the United States, a Syro-Malabar Catholic priest from India, a Ge'ez Rite (Catholic) priest from Ethiopia, and a Presbyterian minister from Korea. Three of us were members of different Catholic religious communities. Despite the differences of culture and background, our common belief in the life and mission of Jesus Christ helped us to bridge those differences.

Another of our common beliefs was our understanding that each of us is called to be a disciple of Jesus. This goes beyond simply knowing what the New Testament tells us about Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, our commitment as Christians demands that we go deeper. As disciples we are called to foster our relationship with Jesus, to know him in a personal way. And, as with any important relationship in our lives, our relationship with Jesus changes us, helps us to grow more into the woman or man that God wants us to be. The Gospel proclaimed this Sunday helps break open what this relationship can mean for our lives.

To begin with, this Sunday's Gospel picks up where the story from the Gospel for last Sunday left off: Simon has just made a profound statement of faith, acknowledging that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the Living God." In response, Jesus gives Simon a new name — Peter — and places him in a position of authority within the Christian community, giving him the "keys to the Kingdom of Heaven." It's a powerful and decisive moment for Peter and the entire Church.

But, as we hear this Sunday, the mood changes quickly as Jesus tells the newly named Peter and the other disciples that Jesus must suffer and die. Peter, always quick to speak, responds in a totally reasonable way: "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." It's almost impossible for him to believe that what Jesus is saying could be true. After all, everything seemed to be going so well.

But Jesus wants none of Peter's objections, declaring "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me." Jesus tells Peter to stop thinking only about their friendship and the success of their mission. God's plans are bigger than anything we can imagine.

An important part of this passage is Jesus' instruction for Peter to "get behind" him. In a sense, Jesus is reminding Peter that it's the disciple's job to *follow the teacher*. Peter has tried to take on the role of the teacher, dictating to Jesus what can and can't happen. By doing this, Peter "the Rock" has become a *satan*, a "stumbling stone" along the way that Jesus is leading his disciples. We know that that path of discipleship becomes the way of the Cross. But, we also know that the Way of the Cross leads into a garden and an empty tomb.

PRAYER

O Jesus,
you are the Son of God.
And so, you not only solve our problems
and respond to our aspirations,
you also do so with unexpected fullness.

As the Son sent to us by the Father,
you are the God who comes to meet us
and manifests for us
the God whom we seek.
You are the revelation of God for us—
the full, perfect, divine revelation—
God in person.

In you the God-who-is-far-off
becomes the God-who-is-near,
the God-with-us,
and the God-who-is-one-of-us,
our companion on life's journey.
You alone, O Lord,
are the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
the Messiah, and the Son of the Living God.
Amen.

(Adapted from "Prayer to Jesus, True God" in the *New St. Joseph People's Prayer Book* [Catholic Book Publishing Company])

Peter could never have imagined any of this, however. In the passage we hear this Sunday, Peter simply hears his friend and teacher predicting that something horrible is going to happen. It makes perfect sense that he would try to prevent anything from happening to Jesus.

But what comes next is very important. Jesus reminds Peter — and us — that it isn't only his journey. Jesus tells us exactly what is expected of anyone who is going to continue to journey with him: we must deny our own preferences and agendas and imitate him.

These are hard words, but their meaning is unmistakable.

Gospel means "Good News" and, although it might not seem like it, even passages like the one we hear this Sunday are good news for us because as we accept the demands of discipleship we are being reminded that we aren't traveling alone. We aren't being asked to forge a new path to God because that work has been done by the one whom we follow and who reminds us by his own life that the darkness of Good Friday is followed by the bright light of Easter morning.

Br. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.