

Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 17

August 30, 2020

Year A RCL

Jeremiah 15:15-21; Psalm 26:1-8; Matthew 16:21-28

“Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”

By: The Rev. Fr. Fabian Villalobos

In today’s gospel, we hear how Peter whom last week was praised from Jesus as the “rock” suddenly becomes the stumbling block of the divine project of God. Jesus predicts His passion and the difficulties He was to endure and suffer before His resurrection. This revelation of a messiah that dies on the cross seems too extreme to accept passively. Peter the “rock” falls into the temptation of glory and false security. He wants to follow another plan and has another way of thinking different from God. *“You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

The tempter and adversary have lured and deceived Peter by setting his mind on earthly things. This text shows us how easy it is for humans to forget about heavenly realities and become worried, attached or dependent on “things” of this world. Instead of fixing our mind and trust in God the tempter replaces it with material stuff that produces human glory and sense of power.

“God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”

We can see that Peter has assumed the role of Satan. He is trying to divert Jesus from His mission with human ambition and the intention of controlling Jesus from accomplishing the will of God. “Get behind me Satan” means follow after me with God as the priority. Discipleship requires sacrifice, obedience, submission and to set God before everybody else.

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

“What does it mean to take up one’s cross?

It means bearing whatever is unpleasant—that is following me. Once you begin to follow me by conforming your life to my commandments, you will find many to contradict you, forbid you, or dissuade you, and some of these will be people calling themselves followers of Christ.

Therefore, if you meet with threats, flattery, or opposition, let this be your cross; pick it up and carry it—do not collapse under it. These words of our Lord are like an exhortation to endure martyrdom.

If you are persecuted you ought, surely, to make light of any suffering for the sake of Christ.”

Sermon 96, 1-4: PL 38, 584-586 Augustine

More than passive witnesses the disciples are associated with the cross and sorrows of the Master. The life of the disciples as followers is cruciform, they need to deny themselves and allow God to be first. The cross is the Christian identity, the path to eternal life that shows sacrificial and unselfish love.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Losing one's life to allow others to live is what Jesus did on the cross. The only way to find the happiness and fullness of life is loving to the end. In these days of pandemic, we continue hearing stories of medical personnel and first responders that work tirelessly to alleviate and comfort people's suffering in hospitals and in their homes. We witness or received the benefits from the continuous work of our armed forces, the police, mothers, fathers, grandparents, brothers and sisters, teachers...etc., and all those who work helping and supporting others. Each time we deny ourselves and consent for God to work in us and through us, His love transforms and improves our surroundings.

The scolding to Peter becomes an opportunity for Jesus to point out to his disciples and to us. the centrality of the cross. It is impossible to be followers

without taking and carrying Jesus' cross going to the New Jerusalem, our final destiny. Even with the difficulties and sacrifices that carrying the cross requires, it is important to know that we are following the Master who teaches us the instrument of salvation as we embrace our own cross. So, let's not fall into the temptation to set our mind on earthly things that prevent us from going after Jesus. Instead, strive to be faithful carrying your cross knowing that the way of the cross is the only door of salvation. Amen