

Readings: Jeremiah 20: 7-9; Romans 12: 1-2; Matthew 16: 21-27



Fr Michael says:

The Cost of Discipleship

Pre-conceived ideas can be dangerous when we seek to enter fully into discipleship with Jesus: our understanding can clash with what He is saying to us and so block our entering into His mind-set. This is what happened to Peter. Jeremiah's faithfulness is contrasted with Peter's reserve: the former's fidelity is recognised in the insults he is given by those who would not accept his message; Peter having rejoiced in proclaiming Jesus as Messiah, is then shocked by what that means in suffering and death – something no Messiah would ever have to suffer, according to Peter! Paul recognises the same truth in his message to the Church in Rome - of not living as the people surrounding them.

By what values and ideals do we live? As a young lawyer, Nelson Mandela was given advice by a friend and colleague: to the effect that all people basically only want money and wealth in life, they represent equal happiness for him! Fortunately for South Africa, Nelson did not follow that advice, but spent many years fostering the wellbeing and human rights of his people, which led to years of persecution, but ultimately led to his freedom and eventual election as the first President of a free South Africa – he is still a model to us today; who has ever heard more of the friend who shared the shallow advice?

Jesus is Messiah, through suffering and death; He shows how much the Father loves us in giving us His Son! His faithfulness and His love would lead to His execution! Peter could not accept this! So his love for Jesus causes him to say what he did and try to steer Jesus away from what would be a dangerous path. Jesus had to decide – without hesitation He chose the latter! Jeremiah did not know what being a prophet would entail; likewise Mandela. Jesus DID however know what He was doing as He set out for Jerusalem – His sacrifice is all the greater because of this knowledge! It still was not easy for him when the moment came! The Agony in the Garden was very real for Him, He even asks for the cup to be taken away – but he submits to His Father! There is a certain comfort in realising that the great figures in the Bible experienced difficulties in keeping to their calling! This is where our sense of vocation is so needed, to keep us focussed. We all find ourselves in challenging situations, when sacrifice is not easy, but it is thus that we are truly formed into being fully disciples. True happiness is only found in doing the right thing! Love is our motivating force for turning crosses into stepping stones: Jesus' journey led to Calvary – but also to Easter, He supports us on the way and shares His victory with us.

“There is a way of losing, by gaining – you win an argument but lose a friend. Through competition and promotion we may advance in our profession, but be impoverished in our relationships. Our energies can be so geared to efficiency and success that we do not grow emotionally and so fail in our relationships. Power can lead to sacrificing friendship and loyalty! Never forget Jesus' words: “What good will it do you to gain the whole world, if you lose your soul.”

Homily for 22nd Sunday Year A



Fr Tom says:

A Passion for Life

When does your heart burn? When the team I support wins! When I am with people I love. With issues about which I care deeply. When I encounter people suffering, or neglected.

This kind of inner burning we more regularly call passion. Jeremiah's passion was so strong, he had to speak out against injustice and infidelity despite the cost to himself. When we think of the passion of Jesus Christ we tend to dwell on his final hours leading up to his ignominious death. But, if we do that, we short change Jesus radically. The passion of Jesus is what motivated him from the first instance; a passion for God, a passion for truth, a passion for the happiness and good of people. It expressed itself in his desire to fulfil the will of his Father because he valued the Father's love and wished to reveal that love to all whom he encountered. He showed this through his teaching, his healing, his openness to the marginalised and excluded and his other miracles. Jesus passion was to reveal God's love and mercy to us so that the experience would create in us a desire, a passion, to do the same. How often did Jesus try to sneak away to spend a quiet time with his Father and his attempt was thwarted by the crowds who came and prevented him from putting himself first because he wanted to respond to their need? Jesus never put himself first and he couldn't have done so even if he tried. So Jesus' passion for his Father and for us provided him with the strength and the courage to endure his final suffering. When we reflect on our lives we also know that this is true for us too.

We are conditioned to think of the Cross of Jesus as the one he carried on that fateful, redeeming Friday, but, once again, this would limit the full meaning of the cross of which Jesus speaks. Everyone born into this world takes up a cross of one kind or another without exception, but most people give it a different name: ambition, power, achievement, self-fulfilment, finding the true purpose in life, happiness, the list is lengthy. So Jesus' invitation to take up his cross is a request to side-step all our desires and make his purpose, his desire, our desire and our purpose. He asks us to trust him which is what everyone who loves us asks of us. This is only possible if we experience his deep love for us. Our purpose is no longer to place the focus on ourselves but on God, and the purpose of God is always about opening us to love, mercy and compassion and all that that implies. Here and elsewhere Jesus tells us that we will be judged by our behaviour, by the way we live and the care we show for others, by our acts of kindness, of self-giving because he knows that this is the best way of discovering the truths of God and an understanding of these truths not so much in the mind but in the heart. After all, this is exactly what Jesus did. We make our life journey (carry the cross Jesus offers us) with a passion and a love that continually reaches out and with Jesus by our side. We are never alone, and, although we are never sure where the path will lead, we know that it will take us ever deeper into the riches, the wonder and the mystery of God. It is the lived experiences we share with those we love that develops and strengthens that love. Accepting the Cross that Jesus offers us is to discover our true passion, our true desire; and, whatever the difficulties, hardships, uncertainties and failings we experience along the way, we know it will lead us to our redemption and the redemption of the world.

“Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do.” Romans 12:2