

September 3, 2023
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 16:21-27

From that time on, 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. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

Background:

In the Gospel text from last week, Peter stated that he believed Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded to Peter by telling him that he was blessed, and that his heavenly Father had been the source of that revelation. That Gospel ended with Jesus strictly ordering the disciples not tell anyone that he was the Messiah. This Sunday's Gospel text follows immediately after that one.

In this Gospel Jesus teaches the disciples that he is not the kind of Messiah that most people are expecting. He makes it clear that he believes he will suffer, die, and be raised from the dead, and that the religious leaders of the day will be involved. These events are to take place in Jerusalem, the center of both religious and civil authority for Jews of their day. The religious leaders he mentioned were from the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the Jewish nation. This body of leaders had permission from Rome to function as a religious authority. Matthew implies that Jesus was regarded as a threat to both Rome's civil order and the Jewish religious order. In their culture, it would have been almost impossible for Jesus and the disciples not to have heard rumors of the plotting against Jesus.

The culture and the lived reality of day focused on the present. People of the day did not think in terms of the future and the world of possibilities. A pregnant woman might think about the birth of her child. A farmer may plan for the harvest of a crop that had already begun to grow. But things like future life or home would not have entered their imagination. Even Jesus, when he spoke about the coming of the Kingdom of God, sounded like it had already begun to take place and would come into its fullness very soon. So here, when Jesus was speaking of his future fate in Jerusalem, he was speaking as a person with the same understanding of the future as the people of his day.

The short dialogue between Peter and Jesus should also be understood from the culture of the day. While Jesus and the disciples would have been aware that the religious authorities were trying to discredit Jesus, and even considering his death, Peter likely clung to some belief that as the Messiah, God would not permit any harm to happen to him. Peter expresses his faith and trust in God. Jesus for his part is being faithful to the will of God. In his view, Peter's hope that he does not have to endure suffering and death is an obstacle to what Jesus has come to believe is God's desire for him. Salvation history is filled with men and women who endured great suffering and even death in their service of the will of God. Jesus' own cousin, John the Baptist, had given his life rather than be untrue to what he believed God was asking of him. Both Peter and Jesus are acting as men of faith and great honor for the people for whom Matthew writes.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are there areas of your own life where you have accepted pain, suffering, and adversity as just being part of life?

2. Do you know people whose primary mode of living seems to be “avoid all pain at all cost?”
3. Do you ever act out of a hope that doing good and following the Ten Commandments will lead to a tranquil and pleasant life?
4. Have you ever discovered that your life was unfolding in ways that you did not expect?
5. How do you understand God’s role in the unfolding of your life?
6. What do you hear Peter trying to say when he tells Jesus, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you?”
7. If you were one of the disciples listening to Peter and Jesus have this exchange, what would you be feeling? What would you say to either of them? Or would you not say anything? Why?
8. Can you take some time now to talk with God about this exchange between Jesus and Peter, or Jesus’ instruction to the disciples that they too must pick up their cross, or something else that arose for you personally from this Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for September 3, 2023, the Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.
All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.
Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message;
the word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day.
I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more.
But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God. O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory,
for your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you.
Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and my exultant lips shall praise you.
You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.
My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.
Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

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.
Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him,
"God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."
He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.
You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."
Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me.
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?
Or what can one give in exchange for his life?
For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory,
and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

Excerpts from Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63:2-6, 8-9; Romans 12:1-2; and Matthew 16:21-27

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for September 3rd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus begins to tell the disciples that he must suffer and die in Jerusalem. Peter objects, "No such thing shall ever happen to you," to which Jesus responds, "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He tells the disciples further, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The other readings also have references about God's way being different from this world's way, what is the greater good, and the need for transformation. In the first reading, Jeremiah describes the difference this way: "You duped me, Lord. The word of the Lord has brought me reproach and mockery. I say to myself, I will not mention him, but then it becomes like fire burning in my heart; I cannot endure holding it in." Psalm 63 proclaims, "My soul thirsts for you, my God whom I seek; My soul clings fast to you, for your kindness is a greater good than life." In the second reading, from the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God."

Two months ago, in another Gospel from Matthew, Jesus reminded us that "my yoke is easy, and my burden light." This could come across as conflicting with today's message, where a follower "must take up his cross." The context of the "yoke is easy" Gospel was that the "burdened" were bearing the weight of the law, as interpreted and complicated by the yoke of the "wise and learned" scribes and Pharisees. The "burden" of Jesus' teaching was light, in contrast, and it was understandable when revealed to even the childlike. In the context of today's Gospel, when a person's denying of self is a renewal, and a complete transformation from this age, their cross is no burden. It is simply doing "what is good and pleasing and perfect." Indeed, as with Jeremiah, when he tries to refrain from speaking of God, that is what makes him grow weary. It is "like a fire imprisoned in his bones;" he cannot endure holding it back!

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!