

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, August 31, 2020

With the tropical storm Laura working havoc in Texas and Louisiana probably moving northeast and coming our way, it is going to be a difficult time for many people in our country. With any such storms there are horror stories about loss of lives and property. But there are also stories of heroism, people risking their lives to help others. Why do people do this? I think it is love! We read and see so much hate in the newspapers and on TV so it is good to hear about people who go out of their way to help others, especially strangers. With this in mind, let us look at the message found in the readings of today's mass.

As I prepared this homily I thought about a vacation a few of my friends and myself took some years ago. It was to Cancun, Mexico. The resort area was so new at the time, that there were only three or four hotels built. There was no chapel or church for Sunday mass. But we found out that mass would be celebrated at the hotel where we were staying. The priest who offered the mass was a young American. His theme for the homily that day was—*Take up your cross and follow Jesus*. At first, I thought how foolish this priest was – talking about the cross and suffering when all of us attending the mass were on vacation. We were all looking to relax and unwind from the normal hectic lives we were living. But the more I thought about this, the more I realized that there is no bad time to talk about suffering. It is the cost of discipleship.

Each of the readings today touch on this theme of suffering. In our first reading Jeremiah, who was called to be a prophet as a teenager, tells us he felt duped by God. His life as a prophet cost him everything he had. His message to the people was a call to reject the Pagan god, Baal and return to worship Yahweh or they would end up in disaster in exile. No one listened to Jeremiah and even his family despised him. Yet he could

not give up his ministry. He tells us: *“the love of God was like fire burning in my heart.”* Jeremiah ended up dying alone in Egypt: “

In our second reading Saint Paul tries to encourage his Roman converts not to imitate the Roman paganism of his time but encourages them to do the opposite: *“do not conform yourself to this age”*

In our Gospel reading we continue from last week’s reading where Peter announced that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Now Jesus is telling Peter and his disciples that he is not the Messiah that they dreamed He would be, namely a new David who would destroy the power of the Romans and bring glory to Israel. No Jesus declares He is the suffering servant of Isaiah. Jesus is going to Jerusalem where He will be rejected by the people and suffer His passion and death and be glorified by His Resurrection. Peter’s reaction is one of love. Peter doesn’t want Jesus to suffer or be hurt. However, Jesus realizes this is the same temptation He had in the desert, namely, to use magical thinking and take the easy way out, so no wonder Jesus calls Peter: “Satan!”

Jesus adds to this picture the call for his disciples and ourselves: if we wish to be His disciples, we, too, must pick up our own cross and follow Him. We do not have to do this alone for Jesus walks along with us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran minister, who died a martyr at the hands of the Nazis in WW II, talks about a faith without a cross as “cheap grace.” He said it was: *“forgiveness without repentance, communion without confession and baptism without church discipline.”*

Yes, there is no bad time to preach about the cost of discipleship. It is not surprising , then, to walk into any Catholic church and see prominently displayed in the apse of the church a Crucifix with Jesus dying on the Cross. It is the very cost of discipleship.