

Homily by Fr. Anthony Davis

“...Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...”

August 30, 2020

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Jer 20:7-9; Rom 12:1-2; Matt 16:21-27

Our readings today offer some difficult challenges not only to the disciples but to us all. We are asked to offer ourselves as “living sacrifice” and “deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Sometimes I think that the disciples had such an advantage over us. They were able to walk and talk with Jesus; they were able to see the miracles firsthand – the sea stilled, the scraps feeding the mobs with leftovers, the blind being able to see and the cripple walking. Yet so many times, they don’t see to “get it.” However, today’s readings especially the gospel, make me think that some of what they were hearing may have been well beyond their comprehension. Perhaps even more difficult for them than us, who see a more complete picture (yet so many times we [me!!] still don’t get it!).

Imagine being the disciples on this walk, perhaps the dialogue with each other (with some of our expressions): That was amazing, wasn’t it? How did He manage to feed all those people? Yeah, and that guy now walking! That’s pretty cool! He surely will lead us to freedom! Hey, did you just hear what He said – He said that we are going back to Jerusalem and He will suffer and die, but be raised on the third day! No, that can’t be – how is that going to help us? Don’t worry, I noticed that his favorite guy Peter is taking Him aside and will get this straightened out. Uh oh, did you hear what He said to Peter? He called him an obstacle! This is not good. He said he was thinking as a human being. How else can he think of us? I’m confused, of course, we think as human beings.

Yes, I guess I need to understand that in those times, it wasn’t any easier being a disciple and understanding all of this (until the Resurrection and the descending of the Holy Spirit) than it is for us at times. While our lives are, indeed, very different from the disciples, and the world around us offers different challenges, the bottom line remains the same.

Consequently, we still need to resist conforming to what is around us, what the secular world calls success and rather, seek the will of God. Thus, after correcting Peter’s protest, Jesus announces the three conditions of Christian discipleship: “Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.” For, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

Jesus told his disciples that they, too, must be willing to lay down their lives in order to gain new everlasting life with the Father in his kingdom. There's a certain paradox in God's economy. We lose what we gain, and we gain what we lose. God wants us to be spiritually fit and ready to do his will at all times. When the human body is very weak or ill, we make every effort to nurse

it back to health. How much more effort and attention should we give to the spiritual health of our hearts and minds!

What did Jesus mean by this apparent new teaching?

Firstly, the one who gives his own life, actually, does not lose, but gains it (v. 25). He who holds tight in his own hands the grain of wheat, who consumes it for himself and hides it, will only dissipate it. Conversely, the only one who has the courage to lose it, throwing it into the ground, “preserves” it, “recovers” it. It also happens with life: to earn it “one must lose it.” It is necessary to expend it for the brothers and sisters.

The second reason (v. 26): the life of this world passes quickly. It is transient, fragile, and precarious; it is not worth clinging desperately to it as if it were eternal. This is why, Psalm 39:6-7, says, “You allow me to live but a short span; before you, all my years are nothing. Human existence is a mere whiff of breath. Humans are mere shadows that go about relentlessly. Being but a breath they toil and rake in wealth, not knowing who will take it next”.

The third reason (v. 27): the ultimate reward. The scene of last judgment which occurs often in the Gospel of Matthew, is not as a future threat, but as an indication of the wise choices to be done in the present. What can one avail to present to God at the end of life? Certainly not the wealth/property accumulated, the pleasures enjoyed, nor awards and career earned. At the end, the Lord will not look at the titles of honor that we will be able to put in front of our name, but the works of love that will follow the name.

When the spotlights that dazzled the scene of this world will be turned off, and when the deceptive glitters of idols that enchanted and seduced many persons are extinguished, then only the light of God will shine and the true value of each person will appear. Therefore, let’s heed the advice of St. Paul (2nd reading) today:

“...Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God... 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”.