

Sunday, 28th March 2020. Second Sunday of Lent

(Readings for this Sunday: Genesis 17.1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22.23-end; Romans 4.13-end; Mark 8.31-38)

Gospel Reading Mark 8: 31-38.

Jesus Speaks about His Suffering and Death

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life." ³² He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. "Get away from me, Satan," he said. "Your thoughts don't come from God but from human nature!"

³⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. "If any of you want to come with me," he told them, "you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. ³⁶ Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! ³⁷ There is nothing you can give to regain your life. ³⁸ If you are ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Try to imagine that you are the disciple Peter. You have been following Jesus for many months and have seen Him cure the sick and even raise the dead. You have seen Him challenge the religious authorities and heard Him speak to huge, enthusiastic crowds of people who travel from far and wide to see and hear Jesus speaking with authority. You have seen Him feed the 5000 and even walk on water.

You believe that Jesus is the Messiah and like many Jews of that time, you believe that the Messiah will save Israel from the Roman occupiers. But then Jesus tells you that He must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later He will rise to life.

How would that make Peter feel? We hear that Peter began to rebuke Jesus; what Jesus is saying couldn't possibly be true. How can Jesus be the Messiah and save them if He is to be killed?

This must have been truly shocking for Peter and the other disciples. It was the worst possible thing Jesus could have said to them. Peter is left with the reality of what being a disciple means and realising that if he truly wants to follow Jesus, he must deny himself and take up his cross. Even more challenging, Jesus says "if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it."

This is quite a challenge; if we want to follow Jesus we have to let go of our own life and follow the teachings of Jesus. I am really challenged by this. It is easy to read about Jesus and what we have to do to follow Him, but it is much harder to discern what He wants us to do as individuals. Jesus was calling Peter to reflect on whether he wanted to follow Him or go his own way.

During this season of Lent we are called to reflect on our own lives and what it means to deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus. To follow Jesus means to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are called to do the best we can with the talents that God has given us and Jesus promised that He will be with us always; but

too often we try to do things in our own strength rather than with the help of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Conversely we may believe we are ill equipped to undertake the tasks that God prompts us to do.

If we want to deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus we have to invite Him into our heart and into the whole of our life. We may let Jesus in through the door but we frequently resist him taking control of all the areas of our lives. As long as we keep some doors closed and locked, He can never be "at home" in our heart.

Our challenge during Lent is to let Jesus into the whole of our life so that He can show us where we need to make changes. Until Christ is at home in our hearts, he may seem like a stranger even though he lives in us.

I would like to commend to you the booklet by Robert Munger (1951) *'My Heart, Christ's Home'*, InterVarsity Press: Illinois.
available from <https://www.usna.edu/Navigators/files/documents/MHCH.pdf>