

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Year

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Voltaire wrote, “God made man in his own image, and man has been trying to repay the compliment ever since!” This is the reason why Peter receives such a dramatic put-down from Jesus. Only a short while before Jesus said, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.” Now he says, “Get behind me Satan! The way you think is not God’s way but man’s.” Simon Peter has acknowledged Our Lord as the Christ, the Son of the living God, but he can think only in terms of power and glory, not a king who must suffer and die on the cross. Jesus says he will indeed come in glory surrounded by the host of angels, but first he must suffer, die, and rise again.

If we want to be disciples, we must tread the same path as our teacher. Peter has already learned an important and practical lesson by being humiliated and corrected in this way. He must have gone a bright shade of red! The kind of self-denial Our Lord asks of us is something much deeper than going without a few comforts or pleasures in Lent. It means surrendering our own way of doing things, and accepting that Our Lord has a better way, one that may be hidden from us. This is the real cross – not having control over our lives, and needing to depend on God, and on other people.

Peter will know this as he grows old. He will be led where he would rather not go, and face his own crucifixion. Paul, too, will face arrest and a lengthy journey to Rome and martyrdom. In our first reading the prophet Jeremiah faces insult and derision, but his heart burns within him, and tells him he must persevere in speaking out. We cannot discover God’s will by forcing his plans to conform to our own hopes and desires. Instead we have to read his purposes in our circumstances, and shape our plans to his agenda.

This calls for one of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit – discernment. Over the summer many of our young people will have been receiving exam results, GCSEs, ‘A’ levels, university exams. They must now discern what these mean for them. Many will have done as well or better than they hoped, and can now take up the courses or careers they have planned for. They may discover after a while that these do not match their expectations, or that life beckons in another direction. Others will not have done so well and feel downcast. Doors seem to shut in their faces. God does not allow doors to shut without opening others, but it may take a while to discern the right way ahead. One of my best friends at school decided not to go to university, but got a job in industry. Later on his company gave him the opportunity to go on for further studies, and he felt that things turned out better for him than if he had gone straight from school. However, there is another twist. He developed Hodgkin’s disease and died in his mid-twenties.

There can be times when the Lord asks us to follow him not simply in set backs, but in longer term suffering, whether sickness or disability. My mother suffered for the last eighteen years of her life from weakness as the result of a stroke, arthritis, a chest weak from several bouts of pneumonia, and eye problems. She rarely complained about these, but what she found very difficult was the need to rely on other people for simple, every day needs. Brought up as an only child to be independent and self-sufficient I can understand how she felt. The values the world around us promotes are those of free choice and self-sufficiency. People question whether life is worth living if they do not have control over their lives. There is constant pressure to legalise assisted suicide or euthanasia. To see things differently needs the new kind of vision that we learn from the Lord. Jesus teaches us that life is worthwhile because we can and must learn to let go of control and entrust ourselves to others, above all to God himself. Without this willingness to let go we may be able to give love, but we will be unable to receive it.