

22nd Ordinary Sunday
August 30, 2020
“Not Quitting”

Jer 20:7-9

Rom 12:1-2

Mt 16:21-27

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Most of the truly worthwhile things we can do in life take much, much more out of us than we initially bargained for. Most of us get really excited and enthusiastic about something important that we undertake – only to discover that it requires more of us than we ever thought possible. Getting married, raising a family, becoming a professional, deciding upon an occupation, entering the military, becoming or even remaining a Catholic Christian – all of these are much more demanding than what we could, at first, see or appreciate.

Of course, when what we have chosen becomes difficult – when we see no end, to the stress and hardship, in sight – we are tempted to quit. It doesn't matter that God guided us into that position to start with – because we can even become angry with God as His will and plan for us unfold in our life.

Jeremiah certainly felt this way in the first scripture for today. He laments that God duped him – God seduced him into being a prophet – into speaking for God to the Chosen People. Perhaps, Jeremiah's ego was involved when God honored him with the prophetic calling. To be someone who spoke for God would be a truly wonderful thing!

However, no one listened to Jeremiah! They hated him and refused to change their hearts and lives. They despised him, mocked him, and tried to kill him. Consequently, Jeremiah decided to quit. He would speak God's words no longer. But God still worked on Jeremiah. God hounded his soul and spirit. So, Jeremiah knew that he could have no peace if he did not live in God, follow God's will, and speak the unwelcome truth to the Chosen People!

Sometime, during his ministry, Jesus realized that things would not turn out well for him, humanly speaking. He could see the growing opposition and hatred of those in power. Furthermore, Jesus understood that there was no way to escape a terrible end if he stayed faithful to the Father's call and will.

However, when Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for what was surely to come, they would have none of it. “Jesus was the Messiah!” “Jesus came to save the Chosen People and deliver them from the Romans!” “He was a wonderwork who was loved by those who were touched by his words!” “There was no way that Jesus could come to a tragic end!”

Consequently, Jesus reprimanded them. He called Peter a satan – a stumbling block! Peter was thinking in human, worldly terms, instead of divine and spiritual ones. Peter and the others had followed Jesus because Jesus was captivating and had a wonderful message. But the disciples were not prepared for all that a true disciple would have to sustain. Besides the ministry of discipleship, they would also suffer greatly, if they stayed committed to their calling from God. Thus, the cross would be part of every disciple’s life.

A crucifixion was not uncommon in those days. It was “the proverbial symbol of suffering and agony.” Moreover, every disciple, then and now, must bravely accept whatever cross that doing the Father’s will entails. Nevertheless, therein lies our salvation and our ultimate glory!

St. Paul reiterates this in the New Testament passage for today. We must not become like those of the surrounding culture or the present age. Instead, we must be transformed by the healing grace of God and the power of Jesus Christ. We must be prepared to offer whatever we suffer – in body or mind – to God. For whenever we do the right thing and follow God’s call and will – we are actually making an act of worship.

Brothers and Sisters, we all know of people who have left their original commitment. If God did not direct them to leave, they are, most likely, not really happy or at peace. Real happiness is in the kingdom of heaven. But inner joy – and peace – are, truly, possible here. These gifts can be ours whenever we say “yes” to God’s call and to the task He lays out before us. They can be ours despite the struggles and hardships that we suffer doing the will of God.

So, let us pray, today, that we never let the things of this world – the culture or the words of others – keep us from the eternal life to which God has destined us.

May we do God’s will in all things and never count the cost!

Amen.

August 30, 2020

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