



THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30TH, 2020

Homily: Matthew 16:21-28

Tay

When Lewis Carroll had become famous through his book, '*Alice in Wonderland*', he decided to follow it up with a second. His second book is '*Alice Through the Looking Glass*.' In this novel, he created a mirror-image world. This means everything is the opposite. If you walk towards something, you will find yourself further away than ever. To get closer to it, you must set off in what seems the opposite direction. Strange! If you have ever tried to cut your own hair, while looking in a mirror, you will know how difficult it is. It takes a sustained mental effort to imagine all the ordinary activities of life working in a mirror. Our world sometimes feels like it is similar. It seems like two different concepts are coexisting together around us. The battleground of the different concepts and directions is our life. Some people say about the practice of self-control. But some people take for granted their rights to pursue more. We have already had enough experience of this throughout this Pandemic; People are trying to have more toilet paper, sanitizer, or masks. It is the human condition to want more, gain more, and possess more. It is not only a problem for the so-called people of the secular world outside the church. It is our problem too. This mixture is where we live every day.

Last week in Matt 16:13-20, we had this question from Jesus, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus blessed Peter and announced he would build his church on the rock, Peter. Peter is definitely a Christian the same as we are. Because we call a person confessing God is alive, and Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah as a Christian.

Peter has made a great confession, and Jesus acknowledged his position over the church.

Let's look at the Gospel reading.

In verse 21, "from that time on", Jesus begins to explain his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. It is the first passion prediction. As Jesus is heading to Jerusalem, he reveals the outline for the culmination of the Gospel to his disciples. However, Peter's reaction is totally opposite to the previous one. He does not accept, but rather rejects what Jesus has just said. He has strong resistance. For Peter, a suffering Messiah seems an impossibility. Although we might be able to understand him because there was no reference to a suffering Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish Apocrypha, and pseudepigrapha, it looks obvious that Peter does not understand what Jesus speaks. He is espousing the common values of the time about power and worth and not espousing God's values. Jesus tells him, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me". Jesus is not saying Peter is demon-possessed or part of the cosmic forces. No, he is saying that Peter stands in the way of Jesus. He is the opposition or adversary. Once Peter was a great confessor, the rock of the church. But now he is an adversary, a stumbling rock.

Jesus diagnoses Peter's problem. He says: "you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Peter does not understand because he is thinking of what human terms. He is looking for what he expects, and he is grabbing what he desires. Peter's mind-set is not framed by God's perspective but by purely human expectations. Graciously, Jesus makes not only diagnosis but also gives a prescription. The prescription to cure the earthly mind is "to take up one's cross and follow him." What do you think? Is it too difficult? No, it is not too complicated. Just as we take a Panadol (painkiller) when we have pain, as we

take antibiotics when we are infected, we just need to follow remedial procedures. Diagnosis, prescription, and treatment.

The important thing here is that we have a crucial question. What does it mean to take up one's cross?

Nowadays, we regard the cross precious as the monumental of our faith. But the origin of the expression came from the gruesome procedures of Roman. The cross was the place people die torturously. In the Roman world, even it was common for condemned criminals to carry their own cross to the place of execution. So, to take up my cross means that I am going to the place where I am about to lay my life down. Therefore, cross-bearing is a symbol of the total denial of self. It is a willingness to die for Christ. We have to nail to the cross our thought of human things. When we see ourselves wanting more, demanding more, possessing more, and expecting our own ways we need to stop and set up our cross and then crucify the greed, desire, and my earthly self. God asks us to seek the things that are above, not the things on earth (Col 3:1-2). This means we surrender our earthly ways and give up our earthly priorities. This means we take the opposite direction against the world saying we should go to. To 'gain' one, we must 'lose' the other; To 'find' one, we must 'forfeit' the other. Then, the final part of Jesus's treatment is to follow him. That is the most gracious command because it means that Jesus will be within our sights. He will be there. He will be on our side. He will be with us. When we bear our cross, when we nail to the cross our desires, Jesus is with us on our whole journey. He will help our directions and moves.

One day, I sat down with my five-year-old son to read a book together. He is in kindy and recently he has started reading simple sentences. There was a rabbit. He went into a garden and ate carrots, lettuces, and big cabbages. He ate whatever

he wanted, and his belly was getting bigger. Suddenly, a farmer came and shouted, "get out of my garden!" The rabbit ran away, and the farmer ran after the rabbit. The rabbit saw a hole and tried to hide in there. But the hole was too small. He got stuck because he ate too much. He could not get in and could not get out. The title of the book is 'Greedy Rabbit.' If we have too many earthly things and human things, we cannot get into the way that Jesus is on. The gate is narrow, and the road is hard, that leads to life (Matt 7:14). We have to choose. We have to make a choice from our cravings blocking our Christian confession. To get it closer to Jesus, we should set off in the opposite direction.

God thinks differently from how we think. God sees everything inside out and upside down. Perhaps we could say that God sees everything the right way round, whereas we see everything oppositely. What we see at the moment as in a puzzling mirror, but eventually, we shall see the way God sees (1Cor 13:12). Today, Jesus calls us to follow him to take the opposite.