

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 12th September 2021 - 24th Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Isaiah 50:5-9. Psalm: 114. 2nd: James 2:14-18.

Gospel: Mark 8:27-35.

The shift in weather, the move in season, the back to school, all mark September changes, as does our gospel for today.

In Mark's gospel the ministry of Jesus falls into two parts. The first builds up to Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Christ – the Messiah.

The second is the road to Calvary. It's a bit like climbing a mountain, In the first half we are climbing higher, and the view is clearing (we hope.) On a clear day the exciting moment of reaching the top, and we can see clearly in every direction. Peter brings the view to a climax, 'You are the Christ.' Many people had been excited by Jesus, wondering who he was, ready to believe he was greater than John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the other prophets. This climatic moment celebrates the end of the first half of the ministry of Christ.

Mark, as ever in a hurry, brings the celebration to a hasty ending. Matthew's account lets the disciples bask for some time in the delight of that blessed recognition, as Jesus proclaims the blessedness of Simon Peter, and gives him the role of foundation rock.

Mark however has Jesus straightaway binding them to strict secrecy about his messiahship. The reason was that people had their own preconceptions of what the Messiah would do for them. They remembered the promise about power and glory, hoping that it would accrue to their own benefit in political and material ways. They conveniently overlook the prophetic figures of suffering and martyrdom.

Today's first reading is about one such suffering servant who would atone for sins by death. Popular perception of the Messiah is that of a political leader who would free the nation from their subjection to the Romans. What Jesus has to offer is the way of suffering, rejection and death, and resurrection. Jesus' vision transcends death and life beyond the grave. So the climb down from the peak of light to the valley of darkness commences

immediately, for Jesus begins to teach them of his destiny with suffering and death. About this there is no question of secrecy. On the contrary 'he said this quite openly.'

Peter took Jesus aside and remonstrates with him. All he could see was the human angle and it did not make sense. Peter is told by Jesus that his way of thinking is the merely human point of view, worse even Satanic; certainly not God's way. Peter is told to step into line behind Jesus.

And all other disciples are told to join Peter if they want their journeys of life to go where Jesus would lead.

There are three things the followers must do.

1 Let them renounce themselves.

What is meant here is something deeper than various acts of self-denial, like things we give up for Lent etc. What this means is daily renouncing narrow human or earth-bound ways of thinking, so as to take on God's way in the values of the gospel. It involves a total self-surrender to the vision of faith; giving up the worldly, secularistic vision of life which disregards the reality of God, and fails to transcend death. Secular thinking generates energy for material possessions, security, power, pleasure and the gratification of our appetites. Followers are to grow in the mind of Christ.

2 Let them take up their cross

This really is as I so often say the 'I' crossed out: The I, me, mine, mentality crossed out, and as we look up the cross to Jesus see his arms opened wide to embrace each and everyone; God and neighbour.

3 Let them follow Jesus.

Christian life is not static, but one is ready to move. It calls for energy on the Christian way and courage in persevering when the journey is hard. At least one reason we stand to hear the holy Gospel is standing ready to carry out its commands. It is a life-times journey.

A saying of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, soon to be declared a saint:

The more we embrace the Cross the more we become one with Jesus

Canon Philip Dyson

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