

22nd. Sunday in Ordinary Time

Most of the priests and deacons of the Archdiocese gathered for three days of retreat at the Passionist Monastery this week. We had a lot of time to pray and reflect. On the first day, we were invited to remember and reflect upon how our vocations first came to us and who played a part in encouraging us to hear the call to ministry. On our second day, we looked at our ministry now. On Thursday, we looked to the future. Each morning of our retreat three priests or deacons shared what they had already reflected up about their call, how they were living it now and what gave them hope for the future. Those reflections were very powerful and some of the men talked about things that happened in their lives that profoundly changed the direction of their lives or how they ministered. We were all invited to think about such life changing moments that may have been part of our stories.

The lives of the apostles were changed when Jesus asked them who they thought he was. Once Jesus had been recognised by Peter as God's Messiah, things could not be the same any more. From then on Jesus concentrated on making clear to his disciples the kind of Messiah that he was. He was not the all-conquering one who would take up his throne of power. As we see today "Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he was

destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously, and then be put to death, and be raised up on the third day."

This was too much for Peter to hear. He took Jesus aside and said, "Heaven preserve you Lord. This must not happen to you." In Peter's mind, God could not do this sort of thing to the Son he loved. But Jesus' reaction makes it so clear that the Spirit of truth was not within Peter at this moment. The one who had just been called blessed because God had spoken through him, is now being likened to the devil who tempted Jesus in the desert. "Get behind me Satan, because the way you think is not God's way but man's". The one who had just been called a rock on which Christ's Church would be built, is now called a rock that was blocking the path of Jesus. He was now the kind of rock that was put there to make Jesus stumble as he tried to fulfil the role that his Father God had laid out for him.

That Peter could at one moment be so insightful, and then so soon be so blind, is something that I find humbling for myself. As I am preparing to celebrate the 46th. anniversary of my priesthood on Monday, I am aware that on many occasions God can do such beautiful things through me. Each day I need to give

thanks to God for the ministry that he calls me and empowers me to exercise. But I am also so aware of my own weakness and of the many things that do get in the way of letting God work through me. I have to remind myself often that the call to priesthood and the loving service that it involves is a gift from God.

In our gospel Jesus then lays down to all of his disciples the cost of following him. “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The Greek words that Jesus used to call Peter to “get behind” him, are used now to call all of his disciples to “get behind” him as he makes his way to the cross. While the shape of that cross will be different for each one of us, none of us can expect to follow Jesus without sacrifice and self-giving. One of the things that gives me life is to come to know something of your stories. As I get to know you I cannot but marvel at the commitment and self-sacrifice that is involved in the life of almost every family. You are there for each other in times of sickness and when things go wrong. You are there for each other as age takes its toll upon your health and freedom.

What is common to all the crosses that we Christians are asked to carry is a denial of self. We are all called

to refuse to give in to the selfishness that tempts us to seek satisfaction in pursuits that lead to nowhere. When we take the risk of losing ourselves to make room for loving others, we begin to find that our deepest longings are being fulfilled. We are made to live with God. We are made to live in union with divine love. We live life to the fullest when we lose ourselves in love.

The last person to share a reflection with us on our retreat was not a priest or deacon but a young married woman. She spoke to us of how her life was turned around when she came to know that being a Catholic was not about obeying the rules but about falling in love with Jesus. She looked forward in hope to a Church in which she could share that love with her own children and with others. She looked forward in hope to a Church that would support her and her family to live well the relationship with Jesus that she had discovered. I think that is what Jesus is inviting us to experience when he says in today’s gospel, “For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.” The life that we find is the inner life of our soul, the life that makes us who we are. That life is not just for this world, but it is a gift that God gives to us to live for eternity.