

REFLECTION FOR 24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YR B

Isaiah 50:5-9, James 2:14-18 Mark 8:27-35

“Do you love me?” + “Of course I do.” “Then how can you leave me?”

Several years ago, a friend of mine recounted a conversation she’d had with her former husband.

They had a big church wedding. They seemed like a golden couple until she had some health issues. And as she planned how to deal with this new medical reality, she felt her husband starting to pull away.

Then came the day when he announced that he was leaving. She did not know what to say, so she asked him, “Do you love me?”

He responded, “Of course I love you. I always will.”

She pleaded, “Well, then how can you leave me if you love me?” And he said, “I love you, but I did not sign up to take care of you.

That’s what he said. And as I listened to his former wife, years later, she said, “When I asked him if he loved me, he got the answer right, but he got the meaning wrong.”

Sadly, I think this happens frequently. How many people get the answer right, but the meaning wrong? How many people say things like:

- + Of course I love you... but that doesn’t mean I should forgive you
- + Of course I love you... but I can’t be patient with your imperfections
- + Of course I love you... but that doesn’t mean I’ll sacrifice for you
- + Of course I love you... but that doesn’t mean I will tell you the truth
- + Of course I love the poor ... but that doesn’t mean I’ll feed them
- + Of course I love the Lord... but that doesn’t mean I’m going to really live the Gospel

And so does St. Peter in today’s Gospel passage!

The disciples of Jesus have been with Jesus for a while now. They’ve heard Jesus preach and teach. They experienced the miracles. The crowds have seen this too.

Jesus put this question to his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told Jesus. ‘John the Baptist,’ they said; others ‘Elijah’; others again, ‘one of the prophets.’

A person might know every Christology and might be able to give a competent teaching about Jesus and still not be a Christian. Christianity never consists in knowing about Jesus, it always consists in knowing Jesus.

That is why Jesus asked his disciples, ‘But you who do you say I am?’

“You are the Christ,” Peter said. Through you, God’s love will be revealed, and God will save his people.

Peter got the answer right. But he got the meaning wrong.

When Peter thought about God’s love working through Christ, he expected Christ to be like Superman. In Peter’s mind, God’s love looked like military victories, Israel’s enemies crushed, Israel’s glory restored. Financial success for everyone. Diseases healed. Peace and power in the land.

Jesus challenges Peter to understand things differently. ‘If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross follow me.’

Unless you die to yourself you will never know who you really are.

St John of the Cross has a very beautiful saying which goes like this “unless you deny what you want, you will never know what it is you really want”.

We think we know what we want, but until what we want is taken from us, as happened in covid times, it’s only then that we recognise what it is we really want: we want other people, we want a relationship with others.

Take up your cross...

People often think the cross is the difficulty which is laid upon their shoulders- no. What is my cross? My cross is who I am. It is not what people ask me to do or the circumstances of life. It is the person that I am that lives in the midst of these circumstances.

Your real cross is you. Your cross forms you, your cross moulds you, your cross crafts you, and that cross will perfect you, it will make you beautiful, it will make you a real human being.

Jesus challenges Peter to understand that love, even God’s love, is about sacrifice, not triumph. It is about selflessness, not selfishness. It is about service, not being served.

God’s love, as revealed in Christ, is not about a crown – it’s about a cross. It is not about a throne - it is about washing feet. It’s not about a monument made of marble – it’s about a tomb near Calvary.

God’s love, our love, authentic love, is always about sacrifice, the willingness to suffer, the call to give without counting the cost.

This is the charism of the Christ. This the truth that Peter missed.

Who is Jesus? He is God’s love in the flesh, which means:

+ Jesus is the one who reveals to us that we are God’s beloved children, even when other voices tell us we are unlovable.

+ Jesus is the one who reveals that everything is forgiven. Everything.

+ Jesus is the one who reveals that your life has value and meaning and purpose, even when you can't see it

+ Jesus is the one who is present in your neighbour, which means that, yes, you must love your neighbour as yourself

+ Jesus is the one who forgave the men who crucified him, so yes he really meant it when he said that we must forgive 70 times 7

+ Jesus is the one whose face is seen in the person sitting next to you, the person you struggle to like, the person you would rather ignore

+ Jesus is the one who demands that we, his people, act with justice and tell the truth

+ Jesus is the one who conquered death, and rose to life

What does the way we live and behave say about who Jesus is? Is the joy, the love, the peace that we find in Jesus reflected in the way we live our lives?

We have to walk the faith; our faith in Christ must be evident in what we say and do. St James in our second reading, tells us faith without good works is dead. Our faith must express itself in works of love.

May the Lord strengthen us when we are weak. May the Lord guide us in time of doubt. May God give us His grace to live out His love.

Fr Patrick