

22nd Sunday In Ordinary Time – Cycle A
Suffering in the Service of God

The theme of this 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time is *Suffering in the Service of God*. The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is a preparation for the message that we will encounter in the Gospel. This is a very personal section of Jeremiah. *You duped me O Lord, and I allowed myself to be duped*. On a human level, he would not have said “yes” to the Lord’s call, but he had no choice because of the love that was burning in his heart. Jeremiah suffered for his obedience. He was thrown into jail, thrown into cisterns, faced assassination attempts and much more all because of his fidelity to the Lord’s call in his life. Jeremiah loves God and because of that love, he responds to the call even though it means suffering for himself.

While the second reading stands alone to some degree in the continued reading of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, it shares some common themes with the theme prevalent in first reading and Gospel this weekend. Up to this point in the letter, Paul has laid out God’s revelation. He has shared the Good News. Now, since we have heard all of this revelation, we have to do something! And what is it the St. Paul asks us to do? *Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship*. Rejoice in the suffering that you endure for the sake of Christ. Here “spiritual worship” means your whole historical existence. Your “everything” is to be offered to God.

This is only possible when we truly allow the Lord to transform and renew our minds. This means resisting being conformed to this age. If we want to know the spirit of this age, we just have to turn on the television. It is a spirit of self-absorption. It is not a spirit of self-giving and sacrifice.

This is expressed beautifully in the Gospel. Jesus has just accepted Peter’s profession of faith and now He reveals to Peter and the others the plan of God; namely, that He will have to suffer and die. For his confession of faith, Peter was inspired by the Father. Now, he is listening to his own wants and desires, so Jesus has to rebuke him. *Get out of my way – get behind me Satan!*. These are strong words, but Jesus is clear that He must do the will of the Father. Why? Because of love. At this point rather than being the rock foundation, Peter becomes a stumbling block.

Then Jesus makes it plain. If you want to be a disciple of mine, you must take up your cross and follow me. It is the only thing that brings true happiness. The saints, some of whom suffered mightily, were joy-filled. They knew that sooner or later the things of this world leave you empty. It is only when you embrace the crosses of this life and walk with the Lord that we can find true happiness and peace. It is useless to have everything the world has to offer and in the process lose eternity because of our own pride, selfishness and greed. The call to take up the cross is a preparation for the final judgment. We will be judged on our works; on how well we put our faith into practice by loving God with our heart, mind, and soul and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves