

Ordinary 22A - September 2-3, 2017

### The Lure of the Easy Way

I like the story of the young man, eager to make it to the top, who went to a well-known millionaire businessman and asked him the first reason for his success. The businessman answered without hesitation, "Hard work." After a lengthy pause the young man asked, "What is the SECOND reason?"

We want to deal this morning with the lure of the easy way. Jesus and His disciples were at Caesarea Philippi. Their ministry to this point had been a stunning success. Crowds pressed in on them everywhere they went. People eagerly reached out to touch this attractive young teacher from Nazareth. The disciples themselves were caught up in the excitement of it all. Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" and Simon Peter answered enthusiastically, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" It was one of the most dramatic moments in the disciples' pilgrimage with Jesus.

Then Jesus changed the subject. He began to tell them that the crowds would soon turn against Him; He would be crucified, on the third day he would be raised. The disciples didn't know what to make of all this. Simon Peter took Jesus aside: "Forbid it, Lord, that these things should happen to you." Jesus' response to Simon Peter is as harsh as any words in the New Testament: "Get behind me Satan! You are not on the side of God but of man."

Perhaps Jesus called Simon Peter 'Satan' because of Jesus' experience in the wilderness immediately after His baptism by John. In today's parlance, it was there that Satan revealed to Jesus the way to make a million dollars in three easy steps turn stones to bread, leap off the pinnacle of the temple, "Bow down and worship me!"

I see Satan not as a red caped figure with a pitchfork but dressed in a \$400 suit and offering in a glib and polished tongue instant success, instant glamour, instant gratification. We can see Satan almost anywhere today. Jesus encountered him this time in Simon Peter: "Forbid it, Lord, that you should have to suffer and die." If there is any doubt that Jesus is resisting the lure of the easy way, listen to the words that follow: "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

We are the devotees of the easy way even though everyone in this room knows two important truths.

1. The Path to Personal Success Is that of Self-Denial.
2. Self-Denial Is Essential to the Salvation of the World.

### It Is Not I

It is said that St. Augustine was accosted one day on the street by a former mistress some time after he had become a Christian. When he saw her he turned and walked the other way. Surprised, the woman called out, "Augustine, it is I". Augustine as he kept going the other way, answered her, "Yes, but it is not I." It is an amusing story - one that comes close to making the same point the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer made when he wrote "When Christ calls a man to follow him, he calls him to die." (by Richard J. Fairchild from *In the Way or on the Way*)

### Deeds Inspired by Love

Frederic Ozanam was a Frenchman whose life of only forty years ended in 1853. The France in which he lived remained torn as a result of the French Revolution in the late 1700's. The Roman Catholic Church had suffered the loss, not only of property and power, but of many lives, and its leadership had become reactionary. As a result, the Church, and even Christianity itself, was treated with distrust by the working class and with disdain by many intellectuals.

Ozanam was in his late teens when he arrived at the University of Paris to study law. He was appalled to encounter there an atmosphere of bitter hostility to the Christian faith. With a number of his fellow students, he formed a study circle in order to present a positive intellectual witness to their faith. The group engaged in many debates and public controversies on behalf of Christianity.

Then one day, a student threw at Ozanam this derisive challenge: "You Christians are fine at arguing, but what do you ever do?" It was in that moment that young Frederic Ozanam was struck by a basic insight: Christianity is not about ideas, but about deeds inspired by love. His fine arguments were useless unless they were validated by how he lived his life. He resolved to start a fellowship of Christian lay people who would immerse themselves in the world of the poor and perform acts of service at personal

sacrifice. This fellowship became the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In making this commitment, Frederic Ozanam died to himself. He picked up his cross, and followed after Jesus. (by Charles Hoffacker from *An Invitation to Die*)

A clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot. It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain. (by Mildred Witte Struven)