

**Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 3, 2017**

When were you really angry with God? When did you ask God “Why me?” Was it when you lost a child, were diagnosed with cancer, were fired from a job, or endured some other difficult struggle? In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah angrily cries out to God. God called Jeremiah to preach to his people. Jeremiah did not want to do this. When he finally decides to preach, the people persecute and plot against him. Have you ever been unwilling to do something that God has called you to do? Have you ever ignored his call?

Many years ago I remember driving by a nursing home on my way to work. Each day that I passed this place the thought came into my head that I should volunteer there. At the time I did not like the smells and sights inside a nursing home. As a youth I would faint as I entered a hospital. I associated nursing homes with hospitals. In other words, a nursing home would be the last place I would volunteer. For two months as I drove by the nursing home this same thought popped into my head and became more and more intense. Finally, I stopped inside the nursing home. (Fortunately, I did not faint) I asked the director if there was a patient there who received few visitors that I could visit regularly. Her face immediately lit up as she ushered me over to an 85 year old woman who was single and Catholic like me. On that day this woman in the nursing home and I started a treasured friendship that lasted until the day of her death.

In today’s gospel Matthew says “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” This reminds me of another story. Years ago my brother Mark, who served in the Wisconsin State Assembly, felt called to introduce legislation that defined marriage as “between a man and a woman.” Shortly afterwards, my brother was working in his office in the capitol when he heard and saw hundreds of protestors chanting their opposition to his legislation. At that moment my brother felt like he was on the cross with Jesus. He felt persecuted. During these kinds of hard struggles God wants us to come to him with our pain, frustration and grief just like Jeremiah and my brother Mark did. Blaming others, wallowing in self-pity, or becoming a chronic complainer does not heal our pain. God is the one person who can understand our deep sorrow and who can heal and renew us. Each time I struggle I find comfort in this saying that my parents taught me, “After each suffering there is a resurrection.” In summary, bring your troubles to Jesus who will comfort you in your earthly life and reward you in your eternal life with him. Praise be God!

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