

Bible Study

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) Lord our God, you are the source of all wisdom. Help us to hear your guiding, encouraging voice in the words we read today. Help us to see every situation through your eyes. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Focusing Questions

1. Where did you encounter the goodness or the awesomeness of God this week?
2. Can you recall a time when you refused to do what God wanted of you or felt God had tricked you into doing something you would not have chosen otherwise? What was the result?

Commentary before the First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

Jeremiah was called to the role of prophet at a very difficult time in Jewish history. The Assyrian armies had occupied the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Babylonian armies were pushing toward Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Idolatry and immorality were common, weakening the people's relationship with God and with each other (as sin always does). Jeremiah's prophecies, understandably, were quite unpopular.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. What did Jeremiah get "duped" into doing?
2. How is Jeremiah treated by his fellow Jews? (verses 7 and 8)
3. Why, then, does Jeremiah continue proclaiming God's message to them?
4. Name the emotions that you detect in this selection.
5. How do you imagine God reacting to Jeremiah's prayer?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Romans 12:1-2

With the beginning of Chapter 12, Saint Paul's focus in the Letter to the Romans switches from a theological discussion about the universality of salvation to a practical discussion about the implications of becoming a disciple of Jesus. The Christians in Rome were, like Jeremiah, surrounded by immorality and worship of false gods. Having faith meant then – as it does now – being different.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. In verse 1, is Saint Paul calling for human sacrifice or for self-mutilation? If not, what is he calling for?
2. How is it possible that daily life can be as holy and pleasing to God as worshipping in church is?
3. Which 3 words in verse 2 are the key to the entire reading?
4. So what is the first consequence of giving one's life to discipleship?
5. Is it possible for a person of faith to be blind to what is "good and pleasing and perfect"? If so, how can one know how to act? If not, why don't believers always do what God desires?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:21-27

This week's Gospel reading picks up where last week's stopped. Jesus had asked the Apostles who they thought he was and Peter gave that inspired answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus had praised him and foretold that Peter would be the primary Apostle in the Church that would form after his death and resurrection. Now the tables turn very quickly! Obviously, Peter's faith was still limited, in spite of its fervor.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which word or phrase in this reading caught your attention?
2. If Peter truly believed that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Christ, why was he so horrified to hear Jesus talk about suffering and death? What was he probably expecting the Messiah would be like?
3. What is Jesus admitting by calling Peter a "Satan"? (This is important! Remember how the devil works.)
4. From a practical point of view, what does it mean to take up one's cross, to carry one's cross?
5. Trying to see this incident from God's point of view, why must a person deny himself and "lose his life" in order to follow Jesus? Discuss also what Jesus means by "lose his life."
6. What is the promise in the last verse?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. As you look around at yourself, your family, and your community, what kinds of things appear to be the focus of most people's lives?
2. To what sorts of temptations do we succumb most easily?
3. Do you see your cross as being a particular aspect of your life, or do you see your entire life as a disciple as being your cross? What would be the difference?
4. As you look back, do you feel you are more conformed to Jesus now than you were several years ago?
5. Faith grows, although it usually grows slowly; what might God want from you that you have thus far been unable or unwilling to do or to give?
6. Would you have to change any aspect of your life in order to make Jesus a stronger focus of your life?

Closing Prayer (adapted from Psalm 63 and Romans 12:1-2)

O God, you are my only God. It is you whom I seek; it is you for whom my soul thirsts. I long to see your power and your glory. Therefore I will praise you all my life and I will glorify you to others by telling them of your great kindness toward me. Make my life holy and pleasing to you by transforming my mind to embrace your will at all times and in all situations. For you are Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God in three Persons. Amen.”
(Sign of the Cross)