

Suffering and Discipleship (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Jeremiah 20:7-9—The Suffering of Jeremiah

1. Persecuted Prophet: Jeremiah the “laughingstock”; “deceived/duped” by God!
2. God’s Word: like “a fire” in his “bones”; he “cannot” hold it in

Psalm 63—My Soul is Thirsting for You, O God

1. The Desire for God: “my soul thirsts” for God (v. 1-2)

Romans 12:1-2—Present Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice

1. Present your bodies as “a living sacrifice”; that is your “spiritual worship” (12:1)

Matthew 16:21-27—Discipleship and Redemptive Suffering

1. Setting: after Peter’s confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi (cf. Matt 16:13-20)
2. Jesus begins to reveal the Mystery of His Passion (16:21)
3. Peter’s Response: takes Jesus aside and “rebukes” him! (16:22)
4. Jesus’ Rebuttal: “Get behind me Satan!”
 - a. You are a hindrance (Greek *skandalon*) to me (lit. “stumbling stone”)
 - b. You are not on the side of God, but of men
5. Conditions of Discipleship: “if any man would *come after me*...”
 - a. Accept Suffering: “he must *take up his cross*”
 - b. Imitate Jesus: “and *follow me*” (to Jerusalem)
6. Paradox of Discipleship:
 - a. Whoever tries to “save” his life → “loses it”
 - b. Whoever “loses his life *for my sake*” → will “find it”
7. Cost of Discipleship:
 - a. What profit? If he gains “the world” but loses his “life/soul” (Greek *psychē*)
 - b. What shall a man give “in return for his life (Greek *psychē*)”?
8. Final Judgment: Son of Man “repay everyone” according to “what he has done”

St. Augustine on the Cross and Love

Our Lord’s command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wants to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of his is true: “My yoke is easy and my burden light.” Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love. (Augustine, *Sermon* 96.1-4)

St. Josemaría Escrivá: Love the Cross

“If anyone would follow me...” Little friend, we are sad, living the Passion of our Lord Jesus. See how lovingly he embraces the cross. Learn from him. Jesus carries the cross for you: You... carry it for Jesus. But don’t drag the cross... Carry it squarely on your shoulder, because your cross, if you carry it so, will not just be any cross... It will be the

holy cross. Don't carry your cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the cross. When you really love it, your cross will be, a Cross without a cross. And surely, you will find Mary on the way, just as Jesus did. (J. Socias, *Daily Roman Missal*, p. 2427).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Have you ever felt like God has “duped” you like Jeremiah? Have you ever been abandoned or rejected by others because you have tried to be faithful to speaking God’s word?

2. What do you think of Jesus’ making willingness to suffer a condition for discipleship? How would you explain the paradox of redemptive suffering to someone who has suffered greatly and doesn’t understand why? Have you ever acted like Peter, and rebuked God for including suffering in his mysterious plan of salvation?

3. Whenever he speaks about “taking up the cross” of suffering, Jesus also speaks about the resurrection and the final judgment. Why do you think he always talks about the resurrection whenever he teaches about the Cross?

For Further Study

1. CCC 554-555, 618: There is no other ladder to heaven apart from the cross. We are all called to become “partners” in the paschal mystery of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection.
2. Hubert Van Zeller, O.S.B. *The Mystery of Suffering: A Spiritual Classic on Trust in Divine Providence* (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 2015). A concise treatment of the mysterious role of suffering in the life of a Christian. Well worth reading.