

Reflection Sunday 28th February

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Last weekend the Church was thinking about Jesus in the wilderness and his being tempted by the devil, Satan. In this passage we find Peter being rebuked by Jesus with the phrase, "Get behind me, Satan!"

This purpose of God of which Jesus speaks, "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering ...and be killed, and after three days rise again," is so important that any opposition to it must be seen as coming from Satan, the Accuser, who truly did not want this purpose fulfilled.

However bizarre the "strategy" seemed to those being taught by Jesus it had to happen for the purpose of God to be filled by His Messiah. Any inherited "Messianic" thinking was to be cast aside in the light of the Messiah God provided in Jesus. Jesus also warned his would be followers that to follow was not to be an easy choice in an earthly sense.

To live in the way of God seems to those around as madness but it is the way Christ calls his people to follow. The "Kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven" challenges the "natural" human thinking of power and glory and what is truly important in life, it seems as madness. As we continue our journey through this season of Lent reflecting upon "Following Jesus" we should pause and see what Kingdom living is to be for us in the now and the future. What are the Kingdom choices in the 21st Century Covid 19 affected world? What are the Kingdom choices to be in the post-Covid 19 world?

Last Sunday morning I listened to the Radio 4 Worship for Lent 1, I found it very helpful. From it I quote Fr Dermot Preston SJ.

Most choices in our lives are actually not between good and evil, but between the good and the better. When a person is really trying to move in the direction of God, it is not easy for the Tempter to dangle evil before them; it is far more subtle for the devil to try to divert them to choose merely the good rather than the better. For the devil it is a small victory – but it is still a victory because it creates a slight division in the human heart – an uneasiness that we have not given our best.

In our world we are, and will be, faced by many choices many of which will not lead to "evil" but many will not lead to the best. To discern the plan and purpose of God is not easy.

Jesus put it this way, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

When Paul wrote to the congregation in Rome, he wrote this,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom 12:1-2)

The purpose of God was fulfilled in Jesus, who went the way of the Cross for our Salvation. It may not have been the way seen by Peter and the other disciples as the way of the Messiah but it was THE Way for God; and that is what matters most. In that way and purpose is the salvation needed for all who give their lives in faith to God.