



SUNDAY GOSPEL

First prophecy of the Passion

MATTHEW 16:21-27

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said. 'This must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.' ■



Domine quo vadis? (1602) by Annibale Carracci

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Mr Sean Donovan

Chairperson – Macarthur Social Justice Network



Charles Dickens' novel "A Tale of Two Cities" is blessed with the most recognisable opening and closing lines of English literature.

Between "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." and "It is a far, far better thing I do, than I have

ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known" unfolds a story of love, sacrifice and redemption.

Our "times" are the "I" generation. iPhone, iPod, iPad: brand names that reflect a long movement toward idolizing self. "I" have a "right" to satisfaction, at whatever cost.

Peter wanted Jesus to take the "I" path: the easy path. Peter becomes "Satan", literally adversary, tempting Jesus from God's path. Jesus, however,

invites Peter to his proper place as a follower. Followers of Jesus must renounce themselves, abandon personal ambition, and actively seek the harder path.

Sydney Carton, in the Dickens' novel, chooses to sacrifice himself for others and knows he will go to a far better rest. Will we do as much? ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



Sunday's reading from the Gospel according to Matthew brings us to the critical point at which Jesus, after having ascertained that

Peter and the other eleven believed in Him as the Messiah and Son of God, "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things..., and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (16:21). It is a critical moment at which the contrast between Jesus' way of thinking and that of the disciples emerges. Peter actually feels duty bound to admonish the Master because the Messiah could not come to such an ignominious end. Then Jesus, in turn, severely rebukes Peter and puts him in his place, because he is "not on the side of God, but of men" (v. 23), unintentionally playing the part of Satan, the tempter. In the liturgy for this Sunday the Apostle Paul also stresses this point when he writes to the Christians in Rome, telling them: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

Indeed, we Christians live in the world, fully integrated into the social and cultural reality of our time, and rightly so; but this brings with it the risk that we might become "worldly", that "the salt might lose its taste", as Jesus would say (cf. Mt 5:13). In other words, the Christian could become "watered down", losing the charge of newness which comes to him from the Lord and from the Holy Spirit. Instead it should be the opposite: when the power of the Gospel remains alive in Christians, it can transform "criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life" (Paul VI Apostolic

Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 19). It is sad to find "watered-down" Christians, who seem like watered-down wine. One cannot tell whether they are Christian or worldly, like watered-down wine; one cannot tell whether it is wine or water! This is sad. It is sad to find Christians who are no longer the salt of the earth, and we know that when salt loses its taste, it is no longer good for anything. Their salt has lost its taste because they have delivered themselves up to the spirit of the world, that is, they have become worldly.

This is why it is necessary to renew oneself by continually drawing sap from the Gospel. And how can one do this in practice? First of all by actually reading and meditating on the Gospel every day, so the Word of Jesus may always be present in our life. Remember: it will help you to always carry the Gospel with you: a small Gospel, in a pocket, in a bag, and read a passage during the day. But always with the Gospel, because it is carrying the Word of Jesus, and being able to read it. In addition, attending Sunday Mass, where we encounter the Lord in the community, we hear his Word and receive the Eucharist which unites us with Him and to one another; and then days of retreat and spiritual exercises are very important for spiritual renewal. Gospel, Eucharist, Prayer. Do not forget: Gospel, Eucharist, Prayer. Thanks to these gifts of the Lord we are able to conform not to the world but to Christ, and follow him on his path, the path of "losing one's life" in order to find it (Mt 16:25). "To lose it" in the sense of giving it, offering it through love and in love — and this leads to sacrifice, also the cross — to receive it liberated from selfishness and from the mortgage of death, newly purified, full of eternity. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Sean Donovan points out for us this week that the temptation of the i-generation is to glorification of self, our own will, not God's will. How easy is it for us to fall into thinking as an adversary of God, by embracing the priorities of the world, and become as Pope Francis describes 'watered-down' Christians! Is this temptation evident in your own thinking and priorities?
2. To avoid being swamped by the ways of the world and be in tune with the ways of God, we need to be willing to 'lose our life', 'take up our cross', 'follow'. Pope Francis calls us to this way of the Disciple through Gospel, Eucharist and Prayer. How can you make these a priority in your life?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *Nurture us Lord through your Word, your body shared in Eucharist and with your Holy Spirit as we call on you.*

Reflect: Listen to the Holy Spirit, who loves and sometimes gently rebukes us so we can 'find life'. How is the Lord, reminding you to 'get behind him', to 'fall in' as a disciple, lose your life, reject worldliness, and embrace God's priorities?

Closing Prayer: Lord, we desire to be your followers, to take up our cross and to follow you. Form us in your ways by the power of your Spirit and nurture us through the Gospel. Amen.