

August 30, 2020 St. Augustine Cathedral/Crawley Center 11:30 a.m.

### Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year

What if you were asked to write down what your 3 most important Life goals are, what would they be? Some might say: Health, Happiness, Long Life; others might say: Success, Fame, Fortune; still others might say: Love, Family and Friends, and Financial Security. There might be those who see their life goals to be consistent with the unalienable rights guaranteed to all Americans in the “Declaration of Independence”: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

The Scripture Readings that we’ve just listened to for this 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time are challenging, because they ask us to think about the Goals that we have for ourselves as People of Faith----as Catholics----as Disciples of Jesus. And the Goals that Jesus Himself identifies are far different than those that we might have thought about on our own.

As we just heard in today’s Gospel passage, Jesus and His Apostles were heading toward Jerusalem, and He decided to tell them what awaited Him there: that He would *“suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests and the scribes; that He would be killed; and on the third day be raised.”* It’s likely that none of them heard anything beyond *“suffer greatly...and be killed”*. The part about *“being raised on the third day”* probably went right over their head; they got stuck on the first two grim predictions. Once again, good ole Peter jumps to the role of Leader to say what probably the other 11 of them were thinking: *“God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”*

Peter was nothing if he wasn’t predictable. He said whatever came into his head, without taking time to think about it. The last time he did that (which we heard about just last week), worked out pretty well. That was when He made the inspired Profession of Faith in answering Who Jesus really is: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”*---and for that, he was congratulated and made the Rock upon which Jesus would build His Church. However, this time, He was sharply criticized, when Jesus said: *“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle to Me.”* In great contrast to the compliment that Jesus paid Peter literally moments before, when he said that Peter hadn’t come to that awareness on his own thinking, but by the Divine Inspiration of His Heavenly Father, Jesus now says the exact opposite: *“You are not thinking as God does”; now, you’re just back to thinking like human beings do.*

Now, we all might very well ask: how else am I supposed to think---I am a human being! How can I think like any other being than who I am? And that's a good point. But isn't our whole life of Faith supposed to be about "enlightening" our minds to see as God sees, not just what we see on our own? Isn't Faith itself about believing what does not come to us naturally? Isn't our most important life-long spiritual challenge the same as what Jesus, in His humanity, struggled to do when He prayed: "*Not My will, but Yours be done*". Shouldn't our entire lifetime be devoted to trying to "think more like how God has revealed to us what His ways are of thinking/seeing/judging/acting?"

But where does that get us? Does that bring us "Success, Fame, and Fortune"; does it help us have "Health, Happiness and Long Life"?

We heard from the Prophet Jeremiah, one of the greatest Old Testament Prophets, in today's First Reading, who was struggling with that very issue---where did being God's Prophet get him? He had never really wanted to be a Prophet; he hadn't signed up, but rather was drafted. Be that as it may, he had always tried to do his best in speaking "God's Truth to the Powers" of his day, from his own Kinsmen all the way up to the King; and what did that get him? They hated him, reviled him, and tried to kill him.

So, in today's Reading, Jeremiah gave God a piece of his mind using some pretty strong language: "*You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped.*" We all know what it's like to be "duped"---and nobody likes to be duped---to be made into a "laughingstock"---to be seen as a "patsy", a "chump", a "sucker". And yet.....and yet, Jeremiah couldn't help himself. God's Word, so deeply imbedded in his being, "*was like a fire burning in his heart*"; it kept pulling him like a magnet, forcing him to speak the Word of God, which he knew was the Truth, in spite of how it caused him scorn and the rejection of his friends and neighbors.

Maybe at times we have had the same feeling Jeremiah experienced. We know what's right. We make the effort to do what's right. But, as we all know---doing what's right can, at times, cause personal pain, and be costly at many levels. It can cause us to lose a friend, alienate a family member, blow a promotion, mess up a promising career, make us look "weak" or "not cool" to those with whom we normally associate. Maybe no one has tried to kill us---yet; but as we know, our Church history is filled with Martyrs---People of Faith who were killed just for practicing/witnessing/preaching/acting on the teachings of our Faith. And not just in ancient times---no, there have been many Martyrs in our own day and

time. Did you know that there were almost twice as many people martyred for their faith throughout the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, than all the other centuries before that combined?!

So, perhaps we need to ask ourselves: how important to me is doing what's right according to God's standards? Is that the most important standard to me, or is it the standard of what others think of me?

When Peter heard Jesus, Whom he had just professed to be the long-awaited Messiah Who was supposed to make all things right, announce that He would "suffer and die", Peter just had to set Jesus straight. I'm sure Peter thought he was being a good friend---a kind of "big brother"---to Jesus, when he said: "*God forbid that to happen to you, Lord.*" So Jesus said "*Get behind me, Satan*". And He said that for two good reasons: first, Peter had to get behind Jesus, because Jesus was still the Leader, and Peter had to be "in line"; and 2ndly, he had to get behind Jesus in the sense of supporting Him, so that He could do what needed to be done, even if that meant suffering and dying; even if it didn't yet make sense to any of them.

From a purely human point of view, of course all of us would want to protect those we love and admire; we would not want anything bad to happen to them. But, if we tell people only what is for their human good, or what make them feel good, we may inadvertently be encouraging them to disregard what God wants them to do. So, as a Friend, as a Spouse, as a Parent, as a Pastor----we need to tell those we love not just what we want them to hear that will make them feel good; we have to tell them what God wants them to know, so they can DO good.

I'm pretty sure that's what St. Paul was telling his dear loved ones as we heard in today's Second Reading in his Letter to the Romans: "*I urge you....do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God---what is good, pleasing and perfect.*" Whether it was those Christians living in the first century or any of us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can never "conform ourselves" to the age in which we live. As Christians---as Catholics---as People of Faith----we should always be trying to conform ourselves to God's ways. That's never an easy thing for any of us to do.

If we take a good long look at this "age" in which we're living, we can see a lot of goodness in our world. But, when we look at the great social unrest in our

world, the blatant acts of racism and violence, the lack of civility in normal human discourse, a growing disrespect for human life and dignity----we can see that there's also a lot of evil at work in the world. As St. Paul reminds us, we need to "discern" what is God's will, and then choose what is "good, pleasing (to God), and perfect."

And I think that brings us right back to what our Life Goals are. Jesus put it as clearly and honestly as He possibly could in today's Gospel. After putting Peter back in his place, Jesus said to all of them---and to all the world: "*Whoever wishes to come after Me*" must in effect have these as our 3 Life Goals: 1) "*to deny oneself*"; 2) "*take up one's cross*"; and 3) "*follow Me*." We can't be Faith-filled, Catholic believers without being "disciples/followers" of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Jesus is telling us what we must do. He doesn't making suggestions, or recommendations; He says this is what is required.

These 3 Goals focus our attention on Eternal Life, not just life here and now in this world. The other Life Goals that we might have can be secondary to these 3, but they can't replace them, or supercede them. We have to remember that we can be "successful, famous and have a huge portfolio"; we can feel secure that we have rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"; and yet, still possibly "lose our eternal life" in the process. As Jesus Himself asks: "*What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit one's life?*" There's no profit; only loss. And it makes no sense.

What Jesus asks of us is not easy; in fact it's extremely challenging. Crosses are heavy; they're burdensome, and usually not very pleasant. Some people have great crosses to carry, and we might very well refer to them as "heroic" as they deal with them with such virtue. But none of us are asked to carry our crosses, great or small, all by ourselves. Jesus walks right beside us and takes most of the weight upon His own shoulders. He encourages us with His Word. He feeds and strengthens us; He becomes our very Food and Energy in the Holy Eucharist. And He reminds us that His dying on Calvary was not the End; it opened the Doorway to Resurrection Life and Glory! That's where our Crosses lead us---not to death, but thru death to Life.

And so, with Jeremiah, may our Love for God and God's ways "*become like a fire burning in our hearts*". With St. Paul, may "*we be transformed by the renewal of our minds in Christ Jesus*". And as we stand behind Jesus, ready to faithfully carry out our 3 Spiritual Life Goals----to "deny ourselves", "carry our crosses" and

*“follow Him” all the days of our lives---we can be confident in Jesus’ promise: “the Son of Man will come with His angels in His Father’s glory, and then He will repay all according to his conduct.”*

God bless you, now and always!