

**Homily For the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A**  
**St. Peter's Sunday 9:30/11:30/5:00 Masses - September 3, 2023**

**Jeremiah 20:7-9** "If I say I will not mention him, within me is a burning fire which I cannot hold in."

**Psalms 63:1-8** "Your steadfast love is better than life. I will lift up my hands and call on your name."

**Romans 12:1-2** "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your minds."

**Matt 16:21-27** "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

**Transformed By Christ**

**Introduction**

Perhaps most people will remember as a child, fascinated with nature, including the various insects, wanting to get a closer look. Did you ever get a glass jar and put a grasshopper in the jar, first making holes in the lid so it could breathe and putting grass and food in the jar so it could eat. You could watch that insect, protected from the dangers of nature outside the jar. But if you left it there too long, your best efforts would not keep it alive. It would die there.

**Matthew**

That's kind of what Peter was trying to do with Jesus. He wanted to protect Jesus and keep him close so he could keep watching him. Last week, we heard how Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He made Peter the first leader of the church. He even told Peter that whatever decisions he makes would be honoured in heaven. Wow, that's power. That's the kind of power that would go to anyone's head. It looks like that's exactly what happens to Peter. Jesus tells the group of them that he is going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, to suffer and to die. Peter says, no way Lord. I am not going to let that happen to you. Peter wants to protect Jesus from harm.

But that is not the way God thinks. That is the way the world thinks. Don't put yourself at risk. Just keep doing the things that make people love you. We find out from Jesus that this is thinking like Satan. Surprisingly, Satan does not want Jesus to put himself out there. Satan wants Jesus to play it safe. Don't upset anyone.

Just keep on doing what you are doing and you will get to stay alive. Peter's mind is not transformed and so he thinks like Satan.

Jesus must go and carry a cross to his own death. That's odd. It was odd for Peter. In fact it was so odd that he figured Jesus must have got it wrong. Lord this must not happen to you. We know that God's plan is for peace, not violence, for good, not for evil, for safety not danger, for love not hate, for hope not despair. So, did Jesus get it wrong? Was Peter wrong or was Jesus wrong? I think I don't have to tell you the answer to that. But we do have to understand how Peter could get it so wrong that Jesus called him Satan.

The kingdom of heaven is the place of perfect peace, perfect happiness. But that path first goes through some dark places. Everyone here knows some of that suffering. You and I could never get to that place that God has prepared for us if Jesus had not walked through that dark and painful valley ahead of us. It would be too much for us to bear and we would give up. Do you see how that is happening in the world. People are giving in to despair because they are walking the path without Jesus, who knows everything we suffer.

So you see how Satan knows that if Jesus takes on that unimaginable suffering, it will make the path to heaven possible for billions of souls to follow him, to give meaning to the suffering of every human being to follow. Without him submitting himself to that torture, our suffering would only be loss and emptiness. We would have no alternative but to give up and seek only selfish pleasure. With Jesus we can do it. Without Jesus we cannot. It's that simple.

Now we might have some sympathy for Peter. Jesus said he would be resurrected but I don't think Peter heard that part properly. He only heard the bad part about what would happen to his friend and teacher and master. He did not know yet what we know, that his Lord and master really would conquer death. God's plan is not thwarted by Satan. None of Herod or Pilate or Judas could prevent it.

## **Jeremiah**

Long before Peter, the prophet Jeremiah was asked to tell people about God's plan. He says that God enticed him to do this. But this was a people that did not want to hear that message. Jeremiah was like Peter. He loved God but didn't have it totally right. Don't think of Jeremiah the prophet as a guy who has it all together from the beginning. Think of him as more like us. He is afraid of doing hard things and being treated badly. His message from God is not going to make everyone happy. He won't be popular. He is announcing God's message in the middle of a culture that does not want to hear it. That's pretty much just like today. Let's face it that western culture today is not friendly to religion. Everywhere on the internet we see this opposition to God. Try speaking to the culture today about the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death. Try saying that and you will start to feel like Jeremiah pretty quickly. Try saying that there are standard moral values that everyone must adhere to and you will experience terror on every side.

## **Romans**

Do not conform to the world. What's so bad about this world? Nothing, except it is not God. It's what God made so that we would see his hand in it and we would want to look up from what he made to the one who made it. Paul says: Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Where do we hear that word 'trans' in the world today. I am not going to talk about that particular trans movement. But I will mention God's trans movement.

To be transformed means to become something that you were not before. Paul says your mind has to become something new. You have to think like God. What about transubstantiation. You know, from the very beginning, the Church believed that Jesus meant what he said at the last supper. He did not say this bread is kind of like my body. He said it is my body, broken for you. In the same way Jesus did not say this cup of wine is like my blood. He said this wine is my blood, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Now that is transformation. That's something that has changed from what it was to

something else entirely. It only happens by the power of God. If that is not true, then only two things are possible. One is that Jesus did not mean it. Really, on the eve of his death when he was going to be tortured and killed and raised again? You think he was now going to speak in symbols at the last moment of his life and time with those who were closest to him and who were to be the first teachers of the Christian faith?

What's the second possibility? It is that Jesus said bread and wine was going to become his body and blood, but he didn't have the power to do that. What did you say? I said that maybe Jesus did not have the power to do what he told the Apostles he was doing. Well, that would be strange. He changed water into wine. He made five barley loaves and two fishes feed five thousand. Is that the Jesus who would not be able to change bread and wine into himself.

Now St Paul says be transformed. But you and I cannot transform ourselves into something that we are not. We can improve ourselves. We can think positively. We can train. We can practice. We can learn. I love stories of people who have been thrown down but have gotten up and made themselves into something that they were not before. However, on our own we can only become something else from this world. We can only conform ourselves to this world. If we want to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, we have to be changed/shaped into Christ. St. Paul is telling us that we must be totally changed into a creature of God, someone who knows how to worship the author of all life. Why worship God? We owe it to God. God did not make us to be mediocre. God did not even make us to be Olympic champions or billionaires. He made us to be transformed into love.

### **Call To Conversion**

We need hearts that are receptive to the Word of God. We need to take bibles out and read them and listen to God, listen to Jesus, the Word of God, so that his seed in us will bear fruit. Don't let that word be fruitless. St. Gregory of Nazianzus says "It is necessary to remember God more often than one breathes." That's our goal, to make God in us like breathing.

Like Peter, we want to put Jesus in a glass jar and look at him and feed him. It may be killed in nature but if we keep it too long in the jar we kill it. That's what happens to Jesus. The powers of the world reject him and kill him, but not before he sets in motion the faith that transformed the world. If we keep him in a jar and look at and be amused by his presence in us will be killed.

What does Peter want to do? Keep Jesus, his precious treasure, in a bubble. He doesn't get it but neither do we most of the time. Jesus is not nice. He is not tame. He is not a flower arrangement. He is fierce. He is powerful. Everything he does, his disciples must do. If his purpose is to stay safe, then his disciples will do the same and all will fade away. But Jesus makes himself vulnerable. He carries a cross and so must his disciples. Satan wants to keep Jesus safe, not because he loves or cares, but because he knows Jesus will show how far love is willing to go. Peter is a stumbling block because thinks like Satan at that moment.

Today you and I are given the task first to let God into our hearts, not to keep in a place where we can just look at him and make him nice. God is not just nice. God is love. Love is more than nice. We have to have a different mindset as Christians. We have to take on the mind of God, which involves sacrifice. The world says give in to your passions. Conforming to the world does not lead to happiness but to slavery. Look at the rates of anxiety as the world gives up this path of following God. Jesus says if you deny yourself for love, you will have peace, not anxiety. Let us ask him for the courage to follow this path.

Today, brothers and sisters, our first task is to let God into our hearts. What is the risk? We might see things from God's perspective. We might begin to love like God loves. We might have the joy of knowing that God loves each of us that way but it won't be easy.

Listening to Jesus' scolding Peter gives us a good motive to make an examination of conscience about our Christian personality. Are we truly faithful to the teachings of Jesus? We are asked once again the same question: "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" There is one answer to this question. Everything!!

## Key Passages

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long. O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full of mercy to all who call to you.*

**Collect:** *God of might and giver of every good gift, put into our hearts the love of your name, so that you may nurture in us what is good and, by your watchful care, keep safe what you have nurtured.*

**I Jeremiah:** *O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed. You have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long. Everyone mocks me. For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*

**Psalms:** *O God, you are my God. For you I long. My soul thirsts for you, as in a dry and weary land without water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. Your steadfast love is better than life. My lips will sing your praise. So I will bless you all my life. I will lift up my hands and call on your name. For you have been my help. In the shadow of your wings I rejoice. My soul clings to you. Your right hand holds me fast.*

**Romans:** *Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Do 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.*

**Matthew:** *Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you!" But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are thinking not as God does, but as humans do." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone wants to become my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit anyone to gain the whole world but forfeit their life? For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each according to their work."*