

TRINITY 15/ORD 24

Isaiah 50:4-9

James 2:14-18

Mk 8:27-35

Good novels and murder mysteries are those with an unexpected twist at the end. Today's gospel reading has a twist that begins with Jesus asking his disciples who people say that he is. Then he asks, "Who do **you** say that I am?" This is a question that all of us have to answer if we claim to be his disciple, but in Caesarea Philippi, Peter gave the right answer. He said, "You are the Christ." That is, Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One.

I should imagine that when Peter gave the right answer there was a collective sigh of relief among the disciples. But then Jesus tells them to keep it a secret. Jews did not believe that God's triumphant Messiah would suffer, so the disciples needed to change their understanding if they were to make sense of what Jesus believed would happen to him.

Jesus explains his likely suffering through the eyes of the prophet Isaiah's Suffering Servant, who features in today's first reading. Isaiah tells us that God's Servant knows he is dependent upon God's guidance and is absolutely obedient to that guidance. Despite any persecution he suffers, he is convinced that God will vindicate him in the end. This is the experience of every prophet from Moses to Jesus. They have trusted and obeyed God even when that was hard. Trust gives birth to obedience to the one who is trusted. Obedience leads in the end to being shown to be right.

Both Isaiah's Servant and Jesus had already experienced God's love, so Jesus accepts that he will die because of the sins of others, but also that God would glorify him after his death. This was quite difficult for the disciples to understand, so Peter rebukes Jesus for saying these things. Jesus fires back because Peter is thinking as the world thinks, namely that the Messiah would be a military conquering hero. For Jesus, to refuse to accept that the Messiah would suffer is the evil agenda of worldly self-centredness.

Peter came up with the right answer to Jesus' first question but being right without understanding the implications, does not always serve the mission of Jesus or the Church. St Mark warns his readers not to apply worldly thinking to God and his ways, because as Isaiah said, his ways are not our ways. The path of discipleship is the Way of the Cross and this will bring persecution and suffering in one way or another to the disciple. Yet Jesus promises that whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.

St James gives the Church more clues that explains the life of discipleship. He asks the question, "What good is faith if actions do not match that faith?" He explains that the faith that saves is a faith that makes Jesus the Christ visible in how the disciple lives. To make Jesus' love visible means we not only have to trust God, but actually believe what God reveals to us. We must not only tell others about the good news of Jesus and his resurrection, we are to live out that truth through exhibiting Christ-like behaviour and doing Christ-like deeds.

The flip side of discipleship is evangelism. The two are inseparable. Evangelism means telling others about God's love for them and the salvation he offers them, but it also means demonstrating that new life of that salvation through serving the needs of others. If someone says to us, "I can't understand all you say but who you are speaks so loud," then we are approaching Christ-likeness.

Doing this will attract ridicule, hostility, being cancelled and persecution. We will be marginalised and silenced in one way or another. This is what happened to the prophets. This is what happened to Jesus and many of his saints ever since. It will happen to all true disciples. Yet we know that Jesus promised that if we persevere to the end, the gift of salvation will be fully ours.

Msgr Harry Entwistle  
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