

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time: Duped by Love

Boy, Peter sure got told off in today's Gospel. "Get behind me Satan." It didn't take ole Pete long to fall off the pedestal Jesus put him on. This Gospel passage comes immediately after last Sunday's Gospel when Jesus called Peter, "Blessed", for proclaiming that Jesus was the Christ. He told him that he was the rock upon which Jesus would build His Church. He told Peter that his decisions on earth, Peter's decisions on earth, would have power in heaven. But now in the passage that follows all this Jesus calls Peter Satan. How did Peter fall so quickly? He fell because he was reasoning things out the way people of the world would reason them out. He was not thinking the way God thinks. He lacked wisdom. The way of the world would be, "Save your life. Don't let anyone kill you." The way of the Lord would be, "Make the sacrificial love of God real. Sacrifice yourself for others."

It is easy for us to think the way the world thinks. Everything around us tells us to take not give, to be concerned about ourselves first and others second, or third or fourth. Fit God in somewhere, if you care. That is the thought process of the world.

"Times have changed, Father. I'm only doing what is perfectly acceptable by our society." And with these words, the elderly lady explained away her present living condition. And with the same words, the young man justified his "wild" lifestyle, and with the same words the abuser justified his actions. And on and on and on. Add in whatever immoral behavior you can think of, and someone will say, "I'm only doing what is perfectly acceptable by society."

But what society is that? In what society is immorality acceptable? It is acceptable by the society that finds nothing wrong with hedonism, putting one's pleasure before every other good in life, including respect for others, respect for country, respect for life. What is the society that so many claim for themselves? It is the society that is at best amoral, but which is mostly immoral. It is the society that is at best pagan, but mostly atheistic. When a person hides his or her immoral behavior behind the "acceptable by our society," argument, that person is invoking the society that St. Paul calls "this age," or, according to some translations, "the pattern of the world." This is the world that Jesus Christ came to save. It is the world of selfishness, a world of pride, a world where God is not wanted. It is a world of darkness. It is a world to which we Christians cannot belong.

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.
Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.*

That is Romans 12:1-2, today's second reading.

We were joined to a new world when we were baptized. Each of us is a key part of the new world, the Kingdom of God. There are hundred, perhaps thousands of people in each of our lives who look to us to illuminate their darkness with the Light of Christ. The problem is that we can easily be enticed by all that is around us. We can easily reject all that is within us. And so we often straddle major issues in life.

We become like my friend Charlie Miller.

It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon at Don Bosco College and Seminary in Newton, New Jersey, as Charlie, myself and a small group of our friends walked by the little lake, more of a pond really. We had an hour to kill between Sunday Mass and dinner, not enough time to change out of our suits, but perhaps too much time for Charlie to spend walking around the property. When we came upon the little dock with the row boats always available for our use, Charlie said, "I'm going to take a boat out. Anyone want to come?" None of us wanted to mess up our suits so we said, "No," and watched Charlie go out onto the dock, untie a boat, and put one foot in the boat while keeping his other foot on the dock. Like the rest of us, Charlie didn't know a whole lot about boats. He didn't know that you need to get into the boat first and then untie it. Nor did he know that if you are going to get into an untied boat, you had better do so quickly. Well, you know what happened. Slowly the boat drifted out while Charlie still had one foot in the boat and the other on the dock. As the boat drifted further and further from the dock, Charlie was stretched out until he lost his balance and fell into the lake. We applauded. Then we fished him out.

We often do this ourselves. We have one foot that we are convinced is safely planted in God's world, but then we stretch out our other foot to another world, the world of pagan society. And we get stretched out. And we fall.

Here is what I mean by this. Even though we recognize our dignity as sons and daughters of God, we often let ourselves get involved in actions that are far less than holy. We think that we are OK, because we are firmly planted on the Lord's dock, but the forces the other foot has stepped into draws us away from the dock, and we end up in the drink.

"I didn't know Christianity would be this difficult," the young couple who are doing their best to have a wholesome relationship complains.

"Wait, you mean that commitment to Christ demands that I stay sober. Everyone I know gets drunk on Friday nights," the senior in high school argues.

"Two can live cheaper than one doesn't apply when both are getting social security, Father. Are you telling me that I am not living my Catholic faith because we won't get married? If that's so, then the faith is demanding too much," the retiree rationalizes.

How did we get into this? Well, Jeremiah really put it so well, so poetically well in

today's first reading: *You duped me Lord, and I let myself be duped.* You tricked me into a life of Love that is far more demanding than I ever expected. And I love it.

We don't embrace Christianity for high theological reasons or arguments. We embrace Jesus Christ for one reason only: we are wounded by His Love. That's from an Irish saint, St. Columban: "Show me my hearts desire, O Lord, for I am wounded by your love."

Men of God, women of God, we have been wounded by Love. When we made the conscious choice of Jesus Christ, we set out on a course of action that does not allow turning back. But we don't care. We are wounded by His Love. And we love it. He is within us, burning out for us to proclaim his presence. Even if we wanted to ignore Him, we can't. We are His.

Better is one day in your house, O Lord, better is one day in your house, than a thousand elsewhere. That is from *Psalms 84*. Better is one day savoring your presence in my life, than a thousand in a luxurious house gained through questionable business practices, gained immorally. Better is one day in your house than a thousand in the arms of an immoral love. Better is one day in your house, than a thousand as the most popular person in school with a talent for quietly destroying others. Better is one day in your house than a thousand parties where drugs and drunks are plentiful.

And yet, still, there is a little devious voice within us that protests, "Does this all need to be so demanding? I am doing my part. I can back off some."

To this voice we shout angrily as Jesus shouted at Peter, "Get behind me, Satan. God's work is all that matters."

We are wounded by Love. And we love it. You duped us Lord, and we let ourselves be duped. We love it. We love you. Nothing else, no one else, matters. Not even ourselves.

Better is one day in your courts, than a thousand elsewhere.