

“Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

In last Sunday's gospel we heard Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter would have kept within that divine atmosphere, in humility waiting for the next set of instructions or teaching.

On the contrary Peter was carried away with his preconceptions. He assumed control of events by expressing his presuppositions about what the Messiah was to do. Peter and his colleagues and perhaps the entire crowd had long expected the Messiah to establish the kingdom of Israel forever as promised to David (2 Sam 7). To have the Messiah subjected into human hands, to suffer and be killed was unimaginable.

Out of his passionate love for Jesus, Peter springs up to assume control. He takes Jesus aside for a private counsel, just like a parent or guardian takes a child aside for guidance or correction to avoid public shame. Peter acted this way because he felt Jesus was not in his right mind because he sounded crazy. Being a great friend, he wanted to protect Jesus against suffering and death.

While still in that state of confusion, Peter receives a sharp rebuke: 'Get behind me, Satan! Peter and his fellow disciples would have been shattered by that remark. Their pride, ego, self-conceived righteousness was put away. They were heart-broken.

Reflecting on moments in the past when I was shattered, my immediate response always shifts away from external/worldly concerns to matters within myself and I become open to a new level of consciousness, a new level of awareness.

Jesus had to apply a spiritual hammer to separate Peter from pride whose source and influence came from Satan. The disciples had to taste the pinch of the hammer to realise, in humility that they know nothing and are in need of God's help.

To clarify it was Satan's influence at work in Peter's life. Please listen to this. Earlier during Jesus' trials in the wilderness, Satan tried to convince Jesus he would achieve greatness without having to undergo suffering and death if he threw himself down the pinnacle of the temple. Satan argued, the heavenly Father would send angels to protect Jesus. We hear the same message of Satan being delivered by Peter, in our gospel.

After Jesus had put his learners in the right state of mind and heart, into a more receptive situation, he began to lay down his plan. He uses an economic language of profit and loss in God's kingdom. He tells the disciples he had come to show us the way to the Father, and to invite us to follow him rather than using our effort in trying to get ahead of him.

Jesus' way of the cross is the way to get to the other end of eternal life, the resurrection life that's established forever. Now to get there requires effort and investment in this present life. If we ignore, it costs us our lives, and if we strive to achieve it, in the way of the cross that he leads by example, we will gain our lives in God's kingdom.

What Peter, his team and indeed the entire community misunderstood, is that Jesus' coming recorded in scripture is twofold. His first coming in the virgin birth in which Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead, is the way to teach us to follow him so as to inherit the resurrection life.

We are still waiting for the second coming in glory. We expect Jesus to come down from the clouds, for the angels have revealed to the disciples during Jesus' ascension: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1.11).

Being a passionately loved friend and Lord, Peter, like his fellow community, expected the Messiah not to undergo agonising situations in the hands of religious leaders. Bear in mind Jesus didn't talk of his suffering in the hands of outsiders – the roman government, but in the hands of the very religious establishment to whom he was ministering.

When Jesus disclosed of what it means to his closed group of disciples, about the way of the Messiah that would lead to inheritance of God's kingdom, it was confronting.

When I consider some individuals who troubled my life and that of my entire family, whom thankfully by God's grace I have overcome, I can understand where the disciples were at and what Jesus' teaching means.

To us now, the cross may not be a physical wood that we carry and be crucified on. Rather, it is the trials and temptations that unseen forces inflict against us, or it may be individuals, families or community troubling our lives.

The invitation Jesus makes is a hard one. Peter and most of his colleagues committed to it and ended their lives in martyrdom. We are similarly called to let go of the ways of this world and embrace the way of the Lord, trusting that God is on our side, navigating us through the cross, the self-sacrifice we make, into communion with him for all eternity.

As to what it is that we are to give-up in self-sacrificial love for the good of others, I leave everyone to work it out. Bear in mind Jesus' words 'those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

The Lord be with you.