Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First reading:
(Jeremiah 20.7-9)
Jeremiah Complains to God

As we saw some weeks ago (the twelfth Sunday of the Year), Jeremiah had a tough time, telling the citizens of Jerusalem that their city was to be besieged and destroyed, and that they themselves were to be dragged into exile. He tried to evade his duty of announcing this dire message, but the Lord gave him no peace, no matter how much he tries to drive the message from his mind.

So, God overpowers or seduces the prophet and compels him to proclaim the message. Both images are important, for it is a tough, but at the same time a willing and joyful compulsion. Jeremiah almost has a sort of love-hate relationship with the Lord. In the same way, Paul says he has no choice but to proclaim the message of Christ.

In the gospel reading, Peter suggests to Jesus that he should avoid the way of suffering, and Jesus refuses to take any escape route. In all these cases, the natural human tendency to take the easier path crashes headlong into the brick wall of God's will. We are always slow to accept the way of suffering. In the gospel, each time Jesus teaches that he can achieve his glory only through suffering, the disciples seem to refuse to listen.

Question: *'Lord, if that is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them' (St Teresa of Avila).*

Second reading:
(Romans 12.1-2)
The People of God

Paul has concluded his account of the saving work of Christ and its consequences for Israel. Now he goes on to detail some of its implications for the Christian life.

The overall banner headline is that Christian behaviour must be totally different from the values of the world, for the Christian is a new creation with a new set of values.

Two aspects are most striking in this introductory passage``; first, the novelty, second, the motivation. In Chapter 8, on the Spirit, Paul repeatedly stresses that not only Christians but the whole of creation is straining to be set free from slavery to corruption; the presence of the Spirit of Christ makes all things new; it is a totally new world.

In today's passage, again he stresses the renewing of our minds. Second, Paul stresses that the motivation comes from within: it is a matter no longer of the external compulsion of the Law, but of inner compulsion, for the Christian has become a living sacrifice, dedicated to God with minds transformed, discerning personally the will of God and acting on this discernment. This is Christian personal responsibility: we must 'discern for ourselves what is the will of God'.

Question:
How do I set about 'discerning for myself what is the will of God'?

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Gospel: *(Matthew 16.21-27)*

The Cross of Jesus

What a turnaround! Last Sunday Peter was being congratulated on at last realizing the Jesus was the Christ. He was promised the keys and authority to make decisions valid in heaven. Now Jesus shoos him away and tells him that he is Satan, the Tempter. Why the change?

Jesus had told Peter that his role as Christ Messiah was to suffer and die in order to achieve his purpose, and Peter shied away from it. What is your particular soft option? What is the difficult task Christ is asking of you, and you avoiding? We are no better than his first disciples!

In the gospel, this will happen twice more: three times Jesus foretells his Passion and each time the disciples simply fail to understand. Each time Jesus again puts it bluntly that you cannot be a Christian without following Jesus in carrying a cross. We see people suffering the whole time, physical disabilities, breakdown of relationships, heartless treatment from others, financial worries - and then we grouse at a twinge of pain or a hurtful word. Carry the cross behind Jesus? Yes, of course I will, but if you don't mind, I'll just take that section that is well padded and fits my shoulder nicely. No point in unnecessary splinters in my neck.

Question:
How does this tally with 'My yoke is easy and my burden light'?