

Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Fr. Chris

In time of the Buddha, a woman named Kisagotami suffered the death of her only child. Unable to accept it, she ran from person to person, seeking a medicine to restore her child to life. The Buddha was said to have such a medicine.

Kisagotami went to the Buddha, paid homage, and asked, "Can you make a medicine that will restore my child?"

"I know of such a medicine," Buddha replied. "But in order to make it, I must have certain ingredients."

Relieved, the woman asked, "What ingredients do you require?"

"Bring me a handful of mustard seed," said the Buddha.

The woman promised to procure it for him, but as she was leaving, he added, "I require the mustard seed be taken from a household where no child, spouse, parent, or servant has died."

The woman agreed and began going from house to house in search of the mustard seed. At each house the people agreed to give her the seed, but when she asked them if anyone had died in that household, she could find no home where death has not visited, in one house a daughter, in another a servant, in others a husband or parent had died. Kisagotami was unable to find a home free from the suffering of death. Seeing she was not alone in her grief, the mother let go of her child's lifeless body and returned to the Buddha, who said with great compassion, "You thought that you alone had lost as on; the law of death is that among all living creatures there is no permanence."

Our scripture for this Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary time speaks to us of oneness and solidarity. It speaks of attachment and the opposite of that, transcendence.

Jeremiah in the first reading realizes that he despite the difficulty and the cost, despite his own comfort, he must admit his connection to the will of God and his obligation to be part of the mission. He knows that he is not alone in his path.

Paul in the second reading is addressing the divisions that

exist in the Church of Rome. There is all sorts of dissension between the Jews, the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Paul warns the community not to conform themselves to the ways of the world, the selfishness and the ego, the desire for power and one up manship and lording it over the other, but rather to realize their connectedness and oneness in the mission of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus proclaims that it is impossible for him not to be connected to the suffering in the world. Jesus' way cannot be that of power and domination but rather of compassion and solidarity. And Jesus tells those gathered and us that in the long run, our salvation is determined by our connection with one another and with those who suffer. Later in this Gospel of Matthew we are given the vivid picture of the judgment when those who are saved are those who saw themselves connected with the poor and the hungry, the imprisoned and the needy.

Of course Peter, Peter who last week recognized Jesus as the Lord of all, would prefer Jesus to be apart from all the discomfort and difficulty. Indeed Peter himself would prefer to be saved from this. And course so would we.

But the Gospel reminds us that we are one- we all are united in the Lord. And so we need to identify with those who suffer and are at loss. We need to see in the face of the homeless person begging on the street, in the person suffering from disease, in the person afflicted with addiction the face of the suffering Christ – the face of our brother and sister.

In this way we not only ease their burden by removing their isolation, but we also share our own suffering and hurts, losses and pains.

In our solidarity – in sharing the cross – we find salvation, we find comfort, we find companions on the journey to the kingdom.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

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在本主日福音中耶穌第一次預言自己的受難。在伯多祿剛剛宣認「基督,天主之子」後,耶穌開始預言自己的受難。伯多祿反對這種前景。與耶穌和伯多祿之間的緊張關係對比,第一篇讀經向我們展示了耶肋米亞靈魂深處的衝突。第二篇讀經是聖保祿致羅馬人書人中長篇訓導詞的開始,邀請我們將自己的身體當作活的祭獻,而完滿地與耶穌的苦難結合。

耶肋米亞處於一種非常困難的環境中,這在他的「耶肋米亞告白書」若干章節中表達了出來。先知向天主抱怨:上主,祢誘惑了我,我讓我自己受了祢的誘惑」。然後他說自己成為天天被人嘲弄的對象,每個人都譏笑侮辱他,因為他總是預言災難、暴力和壓迫。人們不想再聽他說話了。耶肋米亞希望從這種內心的衝突中走出去。但是這卻不可能,因為天主的話,先知性啟示,如同烈火在他心內焚燒,使他不可能將這些話包藏在心裏。

耶肋米亞的這種情況與說明耶穌走向自己的苦難的本篇福音部分地相對應。祂從來沒有抱怨過這種命運,甚至在福音中有一節表示祂渴望面對這惡的決定性戰鬥(路十二 50)。但是伯多祿反對這種未來。他不久前才以無限激情宣告了耶穌默西亞身份和神性,充滿對耶穌的默西亞光榮的神視。耶穌公開預言祂的苦難遭到伯多祿強烈的抵制,因為這種未來與祂想像的相反:不是光榮,而是卑微;不是成功和勝利,而是失敗和死亡。雖然耶穌真的也預言了祂的復活,但是伯多祿不接受這條通向復活的路。於是他開始抗議,對耶穌說:「主,千萬不可。這事決不會發生在祢身上」。伯多祿不接受耶穌的受難。他想要耶穌的光榮,不是經過失敗與痛苦。

從耶穌這一方面來講,已經決定迎上前去。祂不想迴避天主的意願,因為祂知道這是充滿愛的意願,有著非常重要的意義。受難是必要的,因為沒有戰鬥就不會有勝利。祂需要面對惡、罪和死亡,通過這些人類生存的現實繪製出一條出路:一條終極的勝利之路。因此祂責備伯多祿:「你是我的絆腳石,因為你所體會的不是天主的事,而是人的事」。接著耶穌講了一個針對所有人的教導:若要做祂的門徒,需要捨棄自己,背起自己的十字架,跟隨祂。這是耶穌的門徒必須走的道路。每一個基督徒都需要面對惡、罪和死亡,以步武耶穌的芳蹤。這是一條最穩固的勝利之路,一條正確的路,儘管人的本性反對它,希望走另一條路,而避開這些可怕的要求。

耶穌說明,誰想保存自己的生命,反而會喪失生命;但是誰為了耶穌的緣故而喪失生命,卻會得到生命。這是絕對必要的。我們是為了完滿的生命,為了幸福而被造。在我們每一個人內心深處都有一種不可遏止的追求幸福、完滿的生命和榮耀的傾向。但是如果我們直接地去追求,卻是無法達到的。

我們被造首先是為了愛。天主是愛,祂造我們是為了讓我們分享祂的愛。因此我們的目標應該是謀求在愛內有所長進,謀求為了愛耶穌奉獻我們的生命。主說:「誰為了我的緣故而喪失自己的生命,必會獲得生命」。

如果我們直接尋找自己的幸福,會存留在自私主義中,就不能達到完滿的生命,總是處於失敗的狀態。若我們籍著接受來自天主的愛戰勝我們的私心,活出克己和忘我的精神,積極地奔赴愛,那麼我們就會獲得完滿的生命。

福音中有很多類似的要求:為了救自己的性命,需要先捨掉性命;為了獲得光榮、被舉揚,需要先貶抑自己。這一切的關鍵都在一個字:愛。不想自己,不求自己的益處,不尋找自己的光榮,不追逐自己的幸福,而尋求在愛內與耶穌生活在一起。

這樣就達到最高的目標,當然需要以巨大的放棄作代價,徹底的自我棄絕。需要放棄直接撲向幸福和光榮,直接得到滿足的願望,而走一條更穩當的通向那萬分渴望的完滿生命的路。

保祿在致羅馬人書人中也給了我們一個類似的教導。他說:「弟兄們,我以天主的仁慈請求你們,獻上你們的身體,當作生活的、聖潔的、和悅納天主的祭品吧」。我們不應該尋找自己的幸福,而是奉獻我們的身體作為活的祭獻。也就是說---如果我們與羅馬書中的其他章節一起看---將我們的肢體用來侍奉天主的正義、神聖,天主的愛。這才是基督徒「奉獻」的意義。

事實上,奉獻是一項積極的事實:它意味著自己的生命,也在自己的死亡中接受來自天主的愛,以便轉化成上達天主,並中悅於天主的一個奉獻。為了做到這一點,我們必須放棄這個罪惡世界的思維。我們不可接受那尋找享樂、錢財與權力的世俗思想。這些都是自私的追求。我們需要放棄世俗頭腦,在更新我們的頭腦中昇華我們自己,以便有能力選擇天主的聖意,那些美善的、悅樂天主的意旨。天主的聖意,事實上,是讓我們生活在愛內,而不是自我主義內。每一個在愛內的進步,都會帶給我們深切的喜樂、真正的喜樂、神聖的喜樂。天主是愛,祂的喜樂是去愛,祂的光榮就是絕對慷慨的給予。

讓我們在聖體聖事內接受這個如此苛刻的,但同時又是充滿指望的前景。