

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Valerie Place was 23 and a nurse from Dublin, when she saw the suffering children of Somalia on TV. She wanted to do something about that. So, she volunteered with Concern, an Irish relief agency, and went to Somalia and help make a difference. Among the many things she did was food distribution. She was in charge of a center that fed 1200 children. Watching these malnourished kids grow and develop into laughing, singing children was such a joy. Valerie even developed a school at the feeding center for those children who had recovered enough to learn. One day about six months into her two-year commitment a group of bandits ambushed her relief convoy and she was killed.

Valerie knew of the civil war in Somalia. She had seen people killed, yet she wanted to volunteer anyway to let those children know they were loved. She ultimately gave her life to help children live.

The prophets of the Old Testament, like Jeremiah, were called by God and sent to Israel's religious and political leaders telling them to change their ways. They did so knowing it was dangerous, but they knew that had to do it because it was a call from God. Jeremiah lived at a time when the country seemed to be doing well financially. Yet, his message was those days were about to end. God would allow the Babylonians to take into captivity all the people and destroy their cities. No one wanted to believe that message. So, they spurned Jeremiah. They imprisoned him and even threw him into an empty well, hoping he would die there.

Jeremiah had been called by God. That call to be a prophet was special and unique. Perhaps Jeremiah thought the people would heed his words because they came from God. He was sorely mistaken. On what was probably a bad day he cries out to God, "You duped me, and I allowed myself to be duped." Jeremiah didn't receive respect and accolades for doing God's will, but ridicule and suffering.

Jesus knew well that doing God's will could end badly. He knew of the prophets of old like Jeremiah who endured such suffering. But his own cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed by Herod for challenging the king and queen. Martyrdom wasn't a remote possibility for Jesus. The Apostles had signed on to follow Jesus, learn from him, and then continue the work he started. Peter, in their name, had just confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God and Jesus approved of that insight. "No mere mortal has told you this, but my heavenly Father."

So, Jesus is the Messiah. He is the appointed one of God. He is going to smash Pilate and Herod. He is going to restore the kingship to Israel and vanquish the Romans. That is what Peter was thinking. So, it was jarring to hear Jesus say that he would go to Jerusalem not to ascend a throne, but to be crucified! That seemed impossible to imagine.

There is no way we will let that happen, Peter says. It must be that way, Jesus reminds Him. To run away from the cross or to stop teaching and preaching and doing the will of God would be what Satan would want. Peter, you are speaking like Satan when you say such things. Not only would Jesus go to Jerusalem, but he invited the Twelve to join him in this mission. He tells them that if they want to share in his destiny as Messiah and Lord they too must deny themselves and all the comforts they long for. They must take up their cross. Yes, they too would experience suffering and rejection if they continued on this journey.

The Apostles would in time come to understand and accept this challenge to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The question is are we

willing to do the same. For each of us here that call from Jesus will be different. What do you need to deny yourself? Is it a desire for control in this life? Are possessions holding you back from being a true disciple? Ask the Lord in prayer to show you what keeps you from being a true disciple and ask him to give you the courage to let it go.

Taking up one's cross could mean accepting suffering that is part of this world. But it could also mean that it is accepting rejection for doing the will of God. That is much harder. People will give you sympathy for suffering with illness. They will think you are crazy if you are a 23 year old nurse who goes to Somalia in the midst of a civil war.

I pray that the Lord help me to be a better follower each day. I want Him to use me as His instrument. But then I pray that I have the courage to accept whatever crosses will come and still follow. I pray that the Lord will grant you what you need to be His faithful follower too so you might experience the joy that comes from serving Him faithfully in this life and living with him for all eternity.