

**Pentecost 16 year B (24 Ordinary Sunday) 13 September 2015**

**Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a, James 3:1-12, Mark 8:27-38, Ps. 116:1-8**

**Theme: The Marks of a True Disciple**

***"If anyone wants to become my follower, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me."***

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen.**

My dear friends, the readings of today are full of injunctions for the Christian life. The Christian life is one that is lived in conformation with the life of Christ. The disciple is not greater than the master. And hence his summon to us his disciples. If any one wants to be a follower of me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Do the readings of today tell us anything about this challenge to follow Christ?

In the first reading, the third servant Song of Isaiah presents us with a picture of the ideal disciple. Such a disciple has an ear open to hear what God has to say. Verbal insults, physical abuse will not turn from his way. He knows that he is not alone and that God is there to help him. Like Christ, in his passion, he knew the father was with him (John 16:32). Like Paul, he understood that God is like his defence lawyer (Romans 8:31) In the second reading, James writing to the Christians reminds them of the gift they have as teachers of the faith. As members of the body of Christ, each and every member has responsibility to spread the word of God. More however were expected of those disciples who had been particularly endowed with the gift of teaching. He was worried because of the instrument of their trade - which was the tongue.

Why was James worried about the instrument of their trade? We shall come to that later.

In the early Church teachers were of first class importance. They held a place of honour in the society. In Paul's list of those who hold great gifts, teachers came second only to apostles and prophets. While apostles and prophets moved around, teachers worked in the community. To them were left the instructions of those new in the faith.

Because people looked to them, for instructions they were supposed to be knowledgeable in the faith as to be able to impart them.

It was James concern that teaching was a dangerous job because his instrument is speech and his agent is the tongue. It is James' view that the teacher had deliberately on his own accord taken this special office, and is therefore under greater condemnation if he fails in it. Bishops, priest, lay readers beware. Because teachers are held in such esteem in society, James is demanding that they should not forget the responsibility of being a teacher.

James is conscious of the fact that the easiest sin to fall into was the sin of the tongue. We know from our experiences that the tongue is a very dangerous weapon. Our experiences show us that most problems in the world are caused by what have come out from speech.

Jesus himself warned people that they would give account of every word they spoke. In Matthew 12:36, 37 it says '*A soft answer turneth away anger*'. Our reflection on this will tell us that this is every inch true.

In the Gospel, we hear what is known as Peter profession of faith. Jesus wondering if his mission had been understood questions his disciples about whom they think he is. He had earlier asked them about what people were saying about him and they had responded by telling him the popular rumours about him.

As soon as Peter made his profession, Jesus offered no word of congratulations but ordered silence. It is not certain what Peter understood by the messiah and that is why Jesus ordered silence. He could have understood it in the sense of the anointed royal figure, a David to liberate Israel from the foreigner (2 Sam 7). He might have thought of an anointed prophet; according to Luke, Jesus had called himself such a messiah in Nazareth (4:18). Jesus knew he was going through a terrible state and soon he was going to run into all sorts of trouble with the authorities. This will without doubt disappoint many of his followers. The question Jesus asked the apostles is the most important question in the gospel. It concerns the identity of Jesus. He asked the question not for his own sake but for their sake. A question forces people to think about their beliefs. Just as Peter answered, it is important for us to come up with our own answers, to be able to state our own values and beliefs as Christians. It is no longer sufficient merely to repeat the official answers. We have to make the faith our own for it to be alive and influential in our lives.

The Christian understanding of Christ has to include the idea of suffering, death and resurrection (Romans 1:4)

It is clear that Peter didn't fully understand what he said when recognised Jesus as the messiah, he didn't know that Jesus would be a suffering messiah. That was what he had to learn, and learn the hard way. Today, Christ is calling us to follow him. If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me. What does he mean here? How do we understand this? Surely the Lord is not asking us to submit ourselves to pains in a fatalistic spirit as though we are doomed to suffer. He is not suggesting that we invite the birds of sorrow who want to fly over our heads to come and build their in our hair. We must take all legitimate steps to remove or prevent all unnecessary sufferings. But if in spite of that, we still suffer especially along our journey in faith towards full Christian maturity, we are asked to suffer willingly.

Let us reflect on these things.

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Amen**