

TRINITY NEWS

Lent II Whoever Saves a Single Life Saves the Entire World

The passage today contains this first prediction of Jesus' death in Mark's Gospel. Two other predictions follow at 9:31 and 10:32-34. The strange thing is that they come from Jesus himself. Older people may predict that their time is near, but people in their 30s rarely do so unless they have been given a diagnosis that offers little hope.

Jesus uses the prophetic term "Son of Man" to herald his death. Ezekiel had been addressed by God as *ben adam*, "Son of Man", at significant moments in his vocation as a prophet of Israel. "Son of Man" points to a very human representative in Mark's Gospel, but in the later Gospel of John it is a quasi-divine title. However, since Jesus no doubt used it as a personal title or indirect address for his own person, it always carries a note of the divine in the Gospels.

The suffering of the Son of Man will be inflicted by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, the leading people of Israel. Their titles occur in close proximity to his being "killed", though he would be executed by the Romans, not the Jews. The prediction of his resurrection occurs here. Is the suffering a reflection on the Cross and "after three days" another reflection that glances back from the death and resurrection of Christ at the end of all the Gospels? Jesus speaks openly, but Peter takes exception to the prediction. Peter in turn is rebuked by Jesus in front of the disciples. "Get behind me Satan, for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but human things". This is the most humiliating comment that Jesus makes to one of his followers in the Gospels. The prophecy is not just about Jesus perception as a prophet, but an indication of his perception of the will of God. Peter is blasted for getting in the way with his 'negation' of it.

We all dread losing someone who has refreshed our life and opened up new vistas of understanding with wise words or in acts of unsought graciousness that lighten our burden. Peter doesn't 'get' it and he is severely admonished.

Jesus then calls his followers and others in the crowd to take up their cross and follow him. They are asked to deny themselves. Deny what? The tractate Sanhedrin in the Mishnah says that "Whoever saves a single life saves the entire world". Here the saving of ones own life is set against losing one's life for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Teresa of Avila said she would rather give up the chance "to live 1000 lives in order to save one soul". These are either/or statements, stretched out to make a point. Nothing gained can compare to the gain of life itself. Nothing lost can be compared to the loss of life itself. "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life" (8:36-37). The passage ends with a

stern warning for those who hear him to accept him and not to cause shame by rejecting him. Indeed, he says that the Son of Man will repay such insulting behaviour.

Gain and loss are the banner headlines here. Christ will lose everything so that we can gain everything.

The burdens of life come to all of us. The cross is a symbol of suffering, and taking it up is a risky business. Life is not, after all, very predictable.

Jesus reserves some his toughest comments for Peter, and yet he chose him to be a leader in the apostolic band. As he was led away bound to his trial in Luke's narrative, Jesus turns and looks at Peter, and he breaks down and weeps bitterly. Peter loved Jesus, and perhaps he never loved him more than at that terrible moment.

Sometimes it takes the prospect of a devastating loss to wake us up to what we really have all the time. Corazon Aquino said, "I would rather die a meaningful death than live a meaningless life." Politics aside, that is a fantastic statement. It highlights the contrast drawn in this passage.

The denial of food means little in lent. We can stuff ourselves later. Denial of self and ego and false speech, and the denial of the soft option of silence to speak a courageous word that may bring a cross, either small or large, now that would be a Lenten denial!

We are a resurrection people in a Good Friday world, so like the Son of Man we will suffer in our humanity and both figuratively and in the actualization of faith we will rise above it.

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:

- Today, March 4th. Induction of newly elected ECW officers during the 9:30 am service
- Tuesday, March 6. Bible Study, 10am

Next week's Readings:

Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm 19
Romans 7:13-25
John 2:13-22