

## Homily of Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35

The first reading is Prophet Isaiah's prophesy which was fulfilled in the passion of Jesus Christ. "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheek to those who pluck my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame." In today's gospel, Jesus referred to this prophecy, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days" (Mark 8:31). Jesus also did exactly what Isaiah prophesied: "When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

The first reading, however, reminds us of what may come our way as followers of Jesus. There will be times when our backs will be beaten, our beard plucked, our face buffeted and spat upon. Jesus prepares our mind in John 15:20, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Then he promises us, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12). During the time of any affliction, we are to set our "face like flint," that is, we are to "resolutely" keep faith and believe that our God will not allow us to be put to shame. Jesus sets the standard for us, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

St. Mark writes in today's gospel, "Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this, he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do'" (Mark 8:33). At that moment, Peter was a voice of discouragement in the mission of Jesus. Jesus immediately quietened the voice of discouragement. If Jesus, who is God, encountered difficulties, criticisms, oppositions, sufferings, discouragements, and frustrations, then, the same experiences await us who are his followers. When these experiences come our way, let us not surrender to them. Let us draw strength from Jesus; and like him, let us be strong and resolute. On the other hand, let us not be forces of discouragement to anyone by our words and actions.

In the second reading, St. James instructs us that doing good work, especially to strangers and the needy whom we will get nothing in return, is another very important way of expressing our faith and witnessing Christ. St. James asks us, "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16). We fail to witness Christ when we can but fail to help the needy.

St. James says, "What does it profit, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?" (James 2:14). St. James concludes, "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:20). St. Francis of Assisi said to his friars, "Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words;" and "Let all brothers preach by their works."

Peter, who was one of the closest apostles to Jesus, became a Satan's voice of discouragement in the mission of Jesus. Jesus stood his ground and did not yield to him. In the same way, our close ones can become Satan's voices that discourage us from the good works the Spirit of God ministers to our hearts to do. Jesus teaches us how to stand our ground and let the Spirit of God use us. St. Paul instructs us, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20).

There are other types of Satan's discouraging voices. For example, pride can discourage us from a humble good work. Pride can also discourage us from obedience. Selfishness can discourage us from stepping out of our comfort zone to do a good work that requires some sacrifice. Fear can discourage us from a good work that requires courage. Laziness can discourage us from a good work that is challenging. Low-esteem can discourage and destroy our aspiration to do a good work. Rules and regulations can discourage us from a good work of compassion. Greed can discourage us from a good work of sharing or a good work of giving. Anger can discourage us from reconciliation. Insult and persecution can discourage us from continuing a good work we are doing. There are many other Satan's discouraging voices.

In all Satan's discouraging voices, let us not yield but pray for the graces to stand firm and to remain resolute as Jesus did.

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