

What does it mean to you to be a follower of Jesus Christ?

How we do this is as varied as the number of people in the world

Then there is the vocation we have

Married, single

Priesthood, religious, consecrated

And we all have our particular professions as well

Lawyers, doctors, administrators, students

Farmers, plumbers, businessmen and women

There are hermits and cloisters

The list is almost endless

But we have to ask:

First and foremost, *am I a follower of Jesus?*

Or am I this or that who happens to be a follower of Jesus?

Am I an American Catholic?

Or am I a Catholic American?

Am I a Doctor or lawyer or whatever who happens to be a Catholic?

Am I a Catholic who happens to be in business or a student?

How we answer and live this question is critically important

We are called to be Catholic Christians first

How we live that is secondary

This is not easy

But it has never been easy to follow God

Not before Christ

Not when he walked this earth

And not today

And if we find our Christian life a comfortable life

We are very likely duping ourselves

And not in a good way

We hear Jeremiah complaining in our first reading

He claims he had been duped or enticed by God

God had promised to be with him

And Jeremiah believed him

But God didn't tell him the rest of the story

God was with him

But not in the way Jeremiah wished

Jeremiah found following God a difficult life

God had a special mission for Jeremiah

One that Jeremiah didn't much desire

So he finds himself complaining to God

He did not seek to be a prophet

He resisted it from the start

But he was given this call

To deliver God's message to the people of Israel

It was a message of destruction to his own people

Then he is mocked by those he was trying to warn

And when he is faithful, he receives no comfort from God

So he decides, no more

I will never speak in God's name again

But then the silence burns him up from inside

He cannot help it

He takes on the prophet's role

Delivering God's message

And suffering for being faithful

For Jeremiah, following God was not an easy life

For Peter, being a follower of Jesus was not easy

Our Gospel today follows immediately from last weeks

Last week, Jesus called Peter Rock

I will build my Church upon this Rock

And the gates of hell will not prevail against it

Then he gave Peter the keys

What you hold bound on earth will be bound in heaven

What you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven

And like Jeremiah, Peter took him at his word

Then Jesus begins to tell his followers about his coming persecution

His death at the hands of the chief priests and scribes of Israel

Peter, thinking he is special, takes Jesus aside

Pulls him away from the others

Lord, forbid this should happen

And now we hear some of the harshest words Jesus speaks

Get behind me Satan

Jesus is telling Peter that he is being an obstacle to God's plan

Peter was thinking as humans think

But God's ways are not man's ways

Another thing Peter had mixed up

He is called to be a follower of Jesus

Even if he is blessed by God

Even if his is the Rock, the foundation

Even if he has the keys to the kingdom

It is Jesus' kingdom

Peter is thinking he is the leader

And he wants Jesus to follow him

To do as Peter wishes

It is not easy to be a Christian in today's world

Peter gives us something I think we can all identify with

Why would God allow earthquakes, tornados or hurricanes?

Why would God allow cancer, accidents or injuries?

Why would God take my parent when I need them the most?

Why would God allow this child to die?

Why; why; why???

Why would Jesus have to suffer?

If I were in charge, it would be this way or that way

There would be justice in the world

Justice as I see it

But God does have an answer, and he has a plan

And we all have a place, a mission in that plan

The heart of that mission is to be bearers of the divine love to the world

Jeremiah was sent to a world gone wrong

Jesus came into a world gone wrong

We live in a world gone wrong

But the cure is there

Jeremiah complains

Peter tries to rebuke Jesus

But Jesus shows us the path

It is not a comfortable Jesus of our imagination

It is not a pious Jesus

It is not the Jesus of popular Christian rock music

The Jesus Peter wanted to be with was the Jesus that fed the 5000

The Jesus that delivered possessed people

The Jesus that raised others from the dead

He did all these things

But the central aspect of Jesus' mission was his cross, death and resurrection

This is the Jesus we are called to follow

Not lead

He has led the way

He shows us divine love to a world gone wrong

And he invites us to walk with him, following him

Bringing divine love to the world

So whether our personal cross is emotional, financial or personal

We can try denying it

We can try rebelling against it

We can try complaining against it

We can try to numb ourselves with the power of the world

We can try to avoid it

Or we can do as Jesus tells us

Taking up our cross and following

What we choose will define us

And this brings us back to the question I opened with

What does it mean to me to be a follower of Jesus?

Am I a Catholic Christian first?

Or does my profession or my politics take priority?

Many paths lead to death and destruction

One leads through these things to true life

Eternal life