

Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 13, 2009

Readings:

Isaiah 50:5-9

St. James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35

Our first reading from Isaiah presents a dramatic picture of someone who is suffering for their faith. It talks about persecution, discrimination and hard times for being faithful to God under oppressive times. This is not the case for us today within the context of our own society. But the Gospel today has some important lessons for us in our faith as we go from day to day. It starts out with a simple question from Christ but the question is not the end of the account. It begins with Jesus asking his disciples, the ones who had been following him, about the reaction they had been receiving from the people that Jesus has spoken to and those who have had reactions to his words, his signs and his actions. Who do the people say that I am? And the reactions are varied as they think he may be John the Baptist, or the greatest of prophets Elijah from their past. So he pressed the question and Peter gives the definitive response. "You are the Christ." For Peter, Jesus was the one they had all been waiting for. But the conversation does not stop there. Jesus presents the unthinkable. The one who is chosen from God, the one who will be the deliverer, the one who has come to save all of Israel, will be rejected by everyone of importance and then be put to death.

It's understandable, that Peter would have the reaction he did, and would want to protect his Christ. It's not what he would have expected and it's not what he would have wanted. And Jesus makes it clear...in strong language... that it is how it will all come about. And Jesus then takes it to the next level. It is not just about him but about those who will follow him. There'll come a time when the empty cross will symbolize the victory of Christ over death and his resurrection will be a great victory.

But the image of the cross is something that will live on, and will be part of the lives of his disciples. The cross will not disappear once and for all because of Christ's victory. In many different ways, his followers from age to age will experience the shadow of the cross touching their own lives. The passage goes from the good news to the bad. Jesus is the Christ and people will be delivered. But the struggles will not go away for his believers. The twelve will experience it in very dramatic ways. Future generations will experience it in others situations. The cross is nothing that followers really want to think about. It's not the life we would want for ourselves. We want to live a life that is free from struggle, free from confusion or doubt, and free from all the worries of the world. But we still live in the world, and we know the world is not perfect. We also know that we are not perfect. People will affect our lives and at the same time, in imperfect ways, we will affect the lives of the people we touch. It's not because Christ wants it to happen. It happens because of the decision of Christ to allow us to make our own, sometimes flawed decisions, and it happens because of the real human flaws of others who touch us.

We don't have to look far in our world to see that it's true. Especially as we remember this weekend the event's of September 11. But we can see it in our own relationships, and in other ways, that the coming peace of the kingdom that we search for, is not here yet. We live in a time where Christ has saved, and Christ has redeemed us. But we have to admit that the work of the kingdom is far from over. And Christ asks us, in the Gospel today, not to retreat, not to ignore, not to try and isolate ourselves, but instead, as the second reading suggests, to continue with the work he has given us. To continue to show by our faith, by our works, that there is a better way. There is a better way that we and our world are still searching for.