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Today's Word

The Twentysecond Sunday, Year A (30 August)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9

Second Reading: Letter to the Romans 12:1-2

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:21-27

From these three readings

The First Reading reveals Jeremiah's heart in lament. Yet no matter how much he laments, the word of God given to the prophet's heart will never fade away. "The word is locked within my heart and my bones, burning like fire" (Jer. 20:9, Franciscan Translation). Jeremiah hated being made a laughingstock and being mocked by the people. Yet, far surpassing such human feelings, God's word burns within him like magma. And it drives him forward. "You have won" (v. 7, *ibid.*) and "I am exhausted; I can no longer do this" (v. 9, *ibid.*) express Jeremiah's heartfelt desire to entrust everything to God.

In the Second Reading, Paul likewise teaches that we must live in accordance with God's will. To do so, we must offer ourselves as a living sacrifice pleasing to God through worship, and at the same time, we must discern God's will.

In the Gospel reading, Peter—who, thanks to God the Father, had just confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16, New Common Translation)—fails to understand the path Jesus is about to take and tries to settle for a human understanding. In response, Jesus admonishes him, "Take up your cross and follow me" (v. 24, same translation).

To follow Jesus' way of the cross means, just as Jeremiah was captivated by God's word, to be captivated by Jesus, to offer oneself as a holy living sacrifice, and yet to live by denying oneself.

With today's reading, the *Gospel According to Matthew* enters a new phase. From chapter 14, verse 1, through chapter 16, verse 20, the text described Jesus' ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven and the reactions of His disciples and the people to it. Peter's confession, "You are the Son of the living God" (chapter 16, verse 16), revealed who Jesus truly is. Beginning in verse 21 of chapter 16, Jesus reveals His "suffering, death, and resurrection" to His disciples on three separate occasions, as He begins His journey toward the cross. Today's reading is the first of these foretellings of His Passion.

Verse 21 uses the word “reveal” (deiknumi). This word has two main meanings. One is “to point out, show, or make known.” Second, it means “to make clear” or “to prove.” Here, it is likely used in the latter sense.

Jesus gives three predictions of his Passion (Chapter 16, verse 21; Chapter 17, verses 22–23; Chapter 20, verses 18–19). In the first prediction, it is “the elders, chief priests, and scribes” who will harm and afflict Jesus; in the second, it becomes “the people” (verse 22: “The Son of Man is about to be handed over into the hands of the people”); and in the third, it shifts to “the Gentiles” (verse 19: “hand him over to the Gentiles”). It becomes clear that Jesus’ death involved not only the Jewish leaders but also the general populace and even the Gentiles. In other words, the responsibility for Jesus’ death is not, in fact, unrelated to us Gentiles.

Furthermore, verse 21 states, “He is destined to be raised.” This translation allows for two possible interpretations: one interprets it as “it is certain that… must happen,” suggesting that Jesus views His passion, death, and resurrection as events He must passively accept, as if they were fate; the other interprets it as “He must…,” indicating that Jesus regards His passion, death, and resurrection as events through which God’s will is fulfilled. Since Jesus says, “But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?” (Chapter 26, verse 54), it seems that, within God’s will and plan, Jesus was accepting His impending passion, death on the cross, and resurrection.

That is precisely why the phrase in verse 24—“deny oneself and take up one’s cross”—comes alive.

The word “deny” literally means “to reject.” This same word is used when Peter said he did not know Jesus (see Chapter 26, verses 34 and 75).

A disciple of Jesus is not someone who denies knowing Him, but rather someone who denies their own self—hardened by human desires—takes up their cross, and follows Jesus.