

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
20th August 2016

This Sunday's three readings and the responsorial psalm have a beautiful resonance of love and the cost of love; of discipleship and the cost of discipleship. The phrase springs to mind; "there is no such thing as a free lunch", everything costs. That phrase had its origin in the 19th century practice of American hotels, where drinkers were provided with a 'free lunch'. The lunch of course was not free but paid for by the inflated price of the drinks. We all want something for nothing, like Jeremiah in today's first reading we are all seduced by something. The question is what seduces us and are we prepared to pay the cost.

Jeremiah lived in one of the most turbulent times in the history of the ancient Judah. Judah was under the control of Babylon the super power of Jeremiah's time. However the King of Judah had other ideas he plotted a revolt against the Babylonians. Jeremiah thought this a bad idea that could only end in tragedy and said so. It was not a message that either the King or the people wanted to hear and Jeremiah was made a laughing stock, persecuted and put in chains. But despite this harsh treatment Jeremiah proclaims violence and ruin.

He could not ignore the love of a God who had seduced him a love that burned like fire within his heart a fire that was imprisoned in his very bones. For Jeremiah the cost of discipleship was real personal conflict which leads to the spiritual and psychological crisis expressed in the rawness of today's first reading, often referred to as Jeremiah's Lament. Father Geoffrey Plant has a powerful image of the Cross' two intersecting beams making a crossroads a point of decision. Thus the Cross represents a choice, a choice that will often as in Jeremiah's case lead to a personal crisis, a word that comes from the Greek root meaning to judge or decide. At these moments of crisis in my own life I feel like Jeremiah; I feel like I have a choice but there is no choice.

In contrast to Jeremiah's lament of God's seductive power the psalmist seems distant from God. He longs for God like a dry weary land without water. I can't read this phrase from psalm 62 without conjuring up the image of my beautiful Blue Mountains in the grip of a hot relentless drought. A day when the very air seems on fire and the land cries out for rain. But despite God's apparent distance the psalmist still feels the warmth of God's love and is reassured by God's

promise. For me this psalm speaks of the dry times when I feel God's presence but am puzzled by His motive. I might be standing by the side of a desperately ill elderly patient who asks me the simple question: Why? I have no answer, I feel God's love but I have no answer. God is near yet far; although I know Christ is in that patient's suffering that still does not seem like an answer. The most difficult decision to take is simply to say; I have no answer but I'm here with you to share your suffering.

Paul's answer to where's God in our lives is simply to believe God is there. The thing that always puzzled me was; how do I know God's will? Paul simply says to do what God wants. That's all well and good but how do I know? In her commentary on the Rule of Benedict Sister Joan Chittister counsels that we should discern the will of God by praying fervently for the opposite of what we expect to happen then accepting the outcome as God's will.

Like Peter in today's Gospel I find that difficult to accept particularly when I'm with a young dying parent. I can't simply say it God's will that you die and leave you partner and children. Again like Peter and Jeremiah I yell at God: Why! Why are you doing this?

Why must this happen? Why am I part of this? In these moments I realise that like Peter I'm called to follow Christ to Calvary. When I'm called to accompany that dying young parent, that elderly patient; all I can do is to walk with them. I can't give answers but I can be there. In these moments of crisis the image of the Cross' two intersecting beams making a crossroads, a point of decision floods my mind. I seem to be racked by two powerful competing forces, my false-self which is my ego and my true-self which is that part of me known to God. My false-self seeks the quick fix, it knows the "will of God" God's just got to get on and do it as simple as that. My false-self sees every situation as black and white, and puzzles with questions like: How could a benevolent God allow this to happen? The problem with my false-self is it's so wrapped up in 'me' there is little room for anyone else in my life including God. As Thomas Merton says my false-self is known only to me. Peter's rejection of Christ suffering is an echo of false-self. In Peter's view Christ the Messiah should not suffer, God should not allow it. This was a side of Peter not known to God which is why Jesus says so curtly "Get behind me Satan".

My true-self, reflects the face of a suffering Jesus, it is that part of me know to God. My true-self knows God as an intimate lover and is totally seduced by God. It knows that it will never have all the answers but my true-self is content to walk with Jesus to Calvary, simply because it can't bear the thought of Jesus walking alone. My true-self knows the wisdom of the words of Bishop Oscar Romero: "There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried." My true-self hates the pain but walks with the suffering. Its sees knowledge, power, influence, possessions and yes even sex as useful only in the way they can reflect God's love in the service of others. My true-self sees money not as a way of keeping score but as a way of helping others. My true-self is not anchored in the world but anchored in God's love for the world and all creation. The world speaks to my false-self; the Sprit speaks to my true-self. Who do I listen to? The Cross calls me to make a choice, but the choice is mine alone. Like Peter in today's Gospel I will struggle to understand that Christ's suffering is the means of my redemption but like Jeremiah I have been seduced. Love has a cost; discipleship has a cost; there is no such thing as a free lunch.