

Reflections on the Gospel

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

In last week's Gospel, Peter expressed his God-given insight concerning Jesus' identity as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God'. He received a blessing in response and appointment as the 'rock foundation' of the future Church.

But when, in today's Gospel, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples that he is destined to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, Peter, who had so conspicuously got it right, equally conspicuously stumbles at the truth Jesus now goes on to reveal: the more closely, as '(beloved) Son' he is related to God, the more closely he is aligned to the divine will that he enter into the pain and suffering of the world.

Peter's protest is subtle. The suggestion, 'Lord, this sort of thing is not for you!' recalls Satan's earlier attempt (4:8-9) to lure Jesus away from his God-given path by proposing an easy route to rulership of the world. Hence the sharpness of Jesus' rebuke: 'Get behind me, Satan!'

Peter's understandable human desire to preserve the Master from suffering aligns him with the demonic in a way that would thwart Jesus' God-given mission to save the world.

Jesus goes on to speak more generally to all the disciples, describing the conditions for any who want to follow him. It is human to want to avoid suffering and preserve those we love from it. But evil cannot be defeated without cost. Joining Jesus in his mission will mean taking up one's own cross and, in various ways, losing life, in order to find it.

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