

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 13th 2018

In today's reading from Mark's gospel, Jesus chides the disciples for their lack of understanding. They seem to be frustrating Jesus by being opaque to his message to them. They seemed to have missed who he was and what he was ultimately about. In this central part of the gospel things are heating up for Jesus' ministry and he has the Pharisees and Scribes' attention; and theirs is not a good attention.

Up to this point in the gospel, Jesus has earned some following among the people; they seem to be attracted to him or at least intrigued by him. However, from chapter 8 onwards Jesus experiences people turning away from him (including the disciples themselves).

What follows in chapters 8 to 10 spells out this misunderstanding on the part of his close followers. In each chapter (8 to 10), Jesus announces that he will enter Jerusalem and there he will be sentenced to death and, ultimately, be raised from the dead. After each of these revelations, the disciples misunderstand or downright deny what he is saying and three times he responds by spelling out what it means to be his disciple.

There is a similarity in these three movements: Jesus' revelation; their misunderstanding; Jesus' teaching about what it means to be a disciple. Discipleship means humbly trusting his care and love for them and receiving his call to respond to that love by serving others. He models this service for them as he responds to people in need of his ministry.

How frustrating it must have been for Jesus to see how profoundly they misunderstood him. He has spent so much time with them, taught them well, nurtured them, and, presumably would have expected that they got his message. But clearly, they did not.

I am reminded of a long-gone experience in my life. In my junior year of high school, a Jesuit scholastic, Mr. Tom Caldwell, S.J., valiantly tried to teach me Greek with which I was struggling. I was so opaque to understanding what he was teaching yet he was so wonderfully patient with me. He taught so well and insistently, but it ended up being "Greek to me" as they say. I would get it later, but was not ready for it at that time.

And, ultimately, the disciples got it, but only after Jesus' death and resurrection. Prior to that, they continued their classic misunderstanding of who Jesus really was. They were divided and split from Jesus by the cruel crucifixion, and returned only after the resurrection. But they did return and that means everything.

Jesus, come to my misunderstandings of who you are and how I am called to follow you. This is my desire, but it eludes me so often, and I forget your call choosing my ways over yours. Be with me as I learn your great love and respond by acknowledging moving away from my lack of understanding. Let me attend to your gifts of faith, hope and love and to be your messenger (disciple) to those near me. Help me to grow in trusting you and your patience in calling me to service particularly when my eyes and ears seem not to be working effectively

