

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 15th 2024

Quo vadis, Domine?

The Apocrypha of the Acts of St. Peter narrates a story of Peter running away from Rome when faced with increasing persecution in the city. Peter and some of his companions from the early Church decided that it would be best if he left Rome and continued his work elsewhere so that he would escape the threat of persecution and, more importantly, could spread the Gospel elsewhere too.

As Peter was fleeing Rome, feeling confident that he was doing what was best for him and the early Church, he had a life-altering encounter with Christ, in a vision of Jesus walking toward the city of Rome. In pure shock and confusion, Peter asked, “Quo vadis, Domine?” which means, “Where are you going, Lord?” Jesus answered, “I am going to Rome to be crucified a second time.”

To understand the Gospel text better, we should understand the situation in which Jesus makes this prediction about his suffering and death. Peter had just proclaimed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God. But his understanding of the Messiah was totally different from the truth. The similar texts of the synoptic gospels will tell us that Peter could not accept a Messiah who would suffer and finally be killed. His understanding was of a triumphant messiah who would establish his kingdom, and he and his companions would occupy important positions there.

Our faith in Jesus is sometimes like that of Peter and his companions. It is difficult to believe in a God who suffers rejection and death. And it does not stop there. He says if anyone wants to follow me, he has to take up his cross daily and follow! Who does not want to preserve their life? Self-preservation is an instinct. Jesus in the Gospel reminds us that a life focused only on ourselves and our self-advancement is ultimately a recipe for self-destruction.

The only way to live is, like Jesus, to offer our lives for others in love, caring, solidarity, compassion and justice. Because these are the nature of God. When we fail to show this merciful nature of God for the suffering brothers and sisters, we forget that it is the Lord himself who suffers injustice, rejection and persecution. Like Peter, who was fleeing Rome, we try to escape suffering, pain, rejection, and discrimination. In this Lenten season, please stop for a while before Jesus and ask him to guide us on the path that he wants us to walk.

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