

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXII "A"
AUGUST 30/31, 2014
(Lay Witness Stewardship talk #1)

Today's Gospel reading continues the episode of Peter's profession of faith in Jesus as "the Christ the Son of the living God" and Jesus' subsequent setting of Peter as the spokesperson and conservator of the faith of the Church, we heard last weekend. Today, Jesus explains just what his being the "Christ", the Messiah, entails.

Jesus' description of himself as a servant Messiah, a suffering Messiah, a Messiah who would ultimately be rejected and die as a despised criminal but vindicated by God in being raised from the dead in the Resurrection, is too much for Peter to comprehend. Isn't a "Messiah" supposed to be a person who wields supreme power, authority, and influence; crushing their opponents; having everyone kowtow to their slightest whim in fear and trembling? Being a member of such a royal court would mean that he, Peter especially, but the other disciples, too, would be able to "throw their weight around." But this?!!! Like the prophet Jeremiah in the first reading, Peter no doubt felt he had been "duped."

For Jesus, as St. Paul expresses in today's second reading, it is in embracing dying to self, of offering the totality of one's self in carrying out the will of God through service to fellow human beings, that one ultimately finds their true identity as a child of God. Jesus is inviting any who would be his disciples to place their trust totally in God, to let go of self, so that a new self can be given. If we only think of denying and dying as losing, we will recoil as Peter does. If we look at it through the cross to the promise of a new life and the glory that awaits us which Jesus has shown, we will embrace life with open arms—no matter what comes our way. This is what a spirituality of stewardship is all about. The Christian steward-disciple recognizes they are the recipients of the entire legacy of Jesus, including the cross; that through the voluntary offering of themselves God's glory is revealed. They don't live their life in Christ only when it is convenient for them. They have made the decision to take up the cross and carry it, no matter the cost.