

When Jesus announced to the crowd last weekend that he would build his church upon Peter and give him the keys to God's realm, Peter must have felt that he had fallen face forward into the good life. Can't you see Peter's chest swelling with pride too wonderful to disguise? He had left his livelihood, the comforts of home, to take on a tough life with Jesus on the road. And, now, finally, the pay off as Jesus rewards him with his own set of keys. At last, the good life!

The glory and fame are short-lived. Jesus tells Peter and the other boys, "Look, the road to Jerusalem is filled with nails. They'll pierce me and put an end to me, but after three days God will reclaim my life." Peter can't believe his ears. He takes Jesus aside and says, "Come to your senses, man! Don't you remember I just pronounced you the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God? These things don't happen to God; and God forbid, they happen to you!" What, of course, goes unsaid is, "Because, that means that these things will also happen to someone who followed you. Someone like me!"

Jesus, in turn, barks at Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a scandal, a stumbling block, to me as well as to the others with us, for you have set your mind not on divine things, but on human things." As the rest of the air in Peter's balloon of the good life escapes Jesus adds, "You want these keys? Then deny yourself. Take up *your cross and follow me*. Those interested in saving their lives will lose them and those willing to lose their lives for my sake will find them." Gaped mouthed perhaps the prophet Jeremiah's complaint as he sat sinking in the mud of a cistern for his role as a prophet may have come to Peter's mind: "You duped me and I let myself be duped."

Peter and the disciples are ready for a taste of what everyone knows to be the good life. But Jesus gives them, and us, an ad hoc lecture on God's "good life"—a life spent not amassing wealth and privilege for self, of boasting "I alone have done this", but a life spent poured out in service to others: soothing the sick, caring for children in need, hammering nails in houses for those without adequate shelter, sharing bread with the hungry, visiting those in prison.

If we choose the way of Jesus, the good life of God, then we too, must be prepared to have Jesus burst our bubble that faith in him and in his gospel is a recipe for worldly prosperity, security, freedom from trial or suffering (as some popular Christian spiritualities promote). Jesus turns also to us and says, “Get behind me.” That’s the only position from which you and I will ever learn about God’s good life, the Kingdom Jesus proclaims and models for us; standing behind Jesus, listening to him, watching his every move, emulating him, and trusting his promises despite the most lively critics within and outside the church.

In August 2014, nearly two years after his abduction in war ravaged Syria, American journalist James Foley was beheaded by militants of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS). Among his fellow hostages, he was remembered for small acts of kindness, sharing his rations and sustaining their spirits amidst mock executions and frequent waterboarding. Why, many wonder, would anyone submit himself to such danger?

The answer lay in Foley’s sense of vocation learned through his education by the Jesuits: to stand with those who were suffering and use his skills to let the world know of their plight. He could have pursued a career writing about many things, gone on to be a famous journalist. Yet James Foley believed it was necessary for the world to learn the reality of how greed and the lust for power caused immense suffering and death for fellow members of the human family, attempting to galvanize his readers into action to alleviate this scourge of human cruelty. A wasted life? By worldly standards of the “good life”; likely yes. By the standards of the Kingdom of God; a life of eternal richness.

St. Paul urges us today, “By the mercies of God, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rm. 12:1-2). Jesus once again in this Eucharist calls to us: “Do this in memory of me.”

Fr Jim Secora