

# 22<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Matthew 16:21-27

Last week, Our Lord called St. Peter the “rock” (*Mt. 16:18*) on which He would build His Church. This week, Our Lord calls him “Satan” (*Mt. 16:23*). We do not often hear this Gospel in its entirety because it is separated over two weeks, but these two things happened one after the other, maybe within a matter of minutes. St. Peter, out of his love for Our Lord, speaks out against the idea that Our Lord would suffer and die. It is a natural and a human thing to say. Many of us say it ourselves when we say “God forbid” that something bad should happen to someone we care about. Think about what St. Peter did. The Gospel says, “taking him [Christ] aside” (*Mt. 16:22*). In other words, St. Peter speaks to Our Lord privately, most likely as a matter of courtesy since he was about to “remonstrate” (*Mt. 16:22*) or argue with Him. But what does Our Lord do? He refuses to be taken aside and, instead, turns and faces His disciples. But why does Our Lord do this? Because sin is never private.

In our world we are taught that sin is personal and no one can judge me except God alone and that I can do whatever I like as long as I don't hurt anyone else. It's why so many sins today are seen as nothing that really matters and usually just treated jokingly because what I did behind closed doors is nobody's business. It's startling that in a world which has replaced the religion of God with the religion of climate change that people can, in all seriousness, believe that my sin is nobody's business because it doesn't hurt anyone else. We are bombarded by cries to protect the environment because, they say, my individual actions have a direct impact on the planet and so they affect everyone else. And this is true. What I do does have an impact on the environment, for good or for bad. If I throw a cigarette out of the car window then it does affect others because I have polluted the environment in which

others live. So why would it be any different then when I sin? When I do I pollute the environment that is the Body of Christ in which we are all a part.

The great danger that we face is to make sin private. It is true, we all have to face our own spiritual warfare and, in part, prayer, fasting and almsgiving is a personal matter. But the effects of it are universal. When I pray in private, I nurture my relationship with Our Lord and I strengthen the Body of Christ. It is why monks and nuns and priests that live contemplative lives, cloistered and secluded from the world, are called the engine rooms of the Church. Their fervent prayers fuel the Church. It is the same with sin. Nothing I do, even if nobody ever knows about it, affects only me. The sin of Adam condemned every generation to live in exile. The obedience of Christ made possible for every generation the return home.

Another great danger we face is to pretend that there is no such thing as sin. Instead, God just wants us to be happy. No, God wants us to be holy, and in holiness do we find happiness. Tragically, we are more afraid of upsetting someone by telling them that what they are doing is sinful than we are of realising that we may very well be condemning them to hell. We are more concerned with accommodating people, not wanting to upset anybody, just letting people be themselves—“you do you” is a common phrase now. Well that is one of the cruelest things you could ever say to someone. It means nothing more than do whatever you want to do, good or bad—it’s all the same anyway.

Ironically, over the past sixty years religion has become privatised. In a world that labels everything a “community” we are told that religion has no place in any of it. Yet, we are forced to worship at the altars of the world and to subjugate ourselves to the prevailing political ideology. Because if we don’t, then we are judged by a world that tells us we have no right to judge.

If we continue to see sin as private, if we accept that religion should be kept out of society, if we bow our heads to anything and everything but God

alone, then on our judgement day, when the true judge of the world will reign, we, too, will hear Our Lord say to us, “Get behind me, Satan!” (*Mt.* 16:23)

But if we hold fast to our faith, if we believe that we, too, share in the mission of Our Lord which is the salvation of souls—our own and others, if we bend our knee at the name of Jesus, then we will be, as Our Lord, said, “a follower of mine” (*Mt.* 16:24).

In all things, we must see the proper order, the divine order. When I place myself humbly before God, when I recognise that sacrifice is the way of Our Lord, when I understand that social justice flows from divine justice, when I see that the love I have for others is only possible because of the love I have for God, when I know, as St. Paul said, that the “wages of sin is death” (*Rom.* 6:23) and take responsibility for my conversion from sin and turning my heart and mind towards Christ alone—that this is the fight I must fight and the cross I must bear—then, and only then, will I be free.