

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (A-2020)
St. Patrick - Milford

Jesus Christ loves us enough to tell us the truth about ourselves. For many of us, telling the truth about others ... pointing out their failings ... often results in offense and rejection - it's too risky.

However, real love/true love will take the risk, because love always goes after what is best for the beloved. A true friend will tell you when you're wrong, so that you can make a correction and straighten out. Christ is a true friend, and he shows it in this conversation with St Peter.

In last weekend's Gospel reading, after Peter made his profession of faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus elevated Peter to a position of prominence in the coming Kingdom; declaring that Peter is the "rock" upon which he will build his Church. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus makes the shocking announcement that he is going to suffer greatly and be killed - he predicts his passion.

Peter (the rock), probably puffed up with naïve self-importance, takes the Lord aside and discourages him ... and disagrees with him. That's when Jesus comes down hard on him - very hard, calling him "a Satan" and telling him that he is thinking like a pagan, not like a Christian. I propose that only a true friend would do something like that.

By being so firm with Peter, was Jesus risking a walk-away from the rock of his Church. But in this and every case, Jesus cared less about personal popularity than about the saving truth. He is a friend we can count on. Being honest about the hard truths got Jesus in trouble - in fact, it got him crucified.

It wasn't the 1st time that the hard truths brought trouble. The hard truth got the Old Testament prophets in trouble, too! Jeremiah, the author of today's First Reading, is a prime example. Jeremiah's God-given task was to warn the Israelites that if they didn't repent and return to the commandments and the faith of their fathers, disaster would strike.

No one wanted to hear that, especially not the corrupt rulers. So, they tried to shut him up! They spread lies about him ... and they imprisoned him more than once. And yet, God continued to give Jeremiah the courage to speak the hard truths, to warn the Israelites, encouraging them to repent.

Let's listen to Jeremiah again: speaking the name of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach and so I say to myself... I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." Jeremiah was a preview of Jesus. Jesus loves us too much to hide the hard truths - even if he knows that we don't always want to hear them.

Jesus tells us the hard truths we need to hear; he loved us too much to put his own comfort ahead of our salvation. We come to church today to thank him for being a true friend ... for the comfort and confidence that his death won for us.

In return, what kind of friend are we being to Jesus? There are at least two ways we can check up on this.

First, are we honest with him in prayer? It is easy for us to turn our prayer into an exercise in good manners rather than a real, heart-to-heart and honest conversation.

Second, are we courageous about speaking the hard truths to others? Jesus wants us to participate in the salvation of everyone. Do we allow ourselves to be his messengers ... his witnesses? That means that, sometimes, it's up to us to tell them the hard truth that no one else will tell them, to lovingly and sensitively tell them what they really need to hear, so that they don't damage their souls, their lives, and their futures.

No one is perfect. However, the Lord wants us to care enough to reach out to someone who is struggling and help them make the right decision. The best way to thank our Lord for being such a faithful friend to us is to be a faithful friend to others in return.