22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time A 2020

Last week, we have been reminded by the example of St. Peter that all of us are called to be witnesses in our lives. Despite of our shortcomings and limitations, just like Peter, we need to be true to ourselves and our relationship with God and with one another. This is so because to be a witness is not about being perfect, it is about being genuine. The challenge for us to be genuine in our lives is continued in our gospel today.

The gospel passage we just heard today follows immediately last week's gospel where Christ dubs Peter as the "rock" upon which he will build his Church. After lifting up Peter's status, Jesus then makes the shocking announcement that he is going to suffer greatly and be killed in Jerusalem. Peter, feeling a sort of naïve self-importance, takes the Lord aside and disagrees with him. That is when Christ comes down hard on him - very hard, calling him "Satan" and telling him that he is thinking like a pagan, not like a Christian. This may sound harsh and hurtful, but this is a loving rebuke coming from Jesus.

Jesus loves Peter so much that he can tell him the hard truths and reality about him. In real life, the people who selfishly use other people instead of seeking their authentic good rarely tell them the hard truths. It is too risky. Pointing out failings may result in offense or rejection. But true love will take the risk, right? Because love always goes after what is best for the beloved. We know that a loving parent will tell us when we are wrong, so that we can straighten up. A true friend will tell us the hard truths about ourselves so that we can become better in our relationships.

Looking into my own personal experience, this is probably why I have issues with my Dad because he tells me things that I do not want to hear. But he must tell me the hard truths about myself, right, because he loves me and he wants the best for me. I know that and I believe that but still, I don't want to hear it. What does he know, Right 😊 This is why I am amazed with Peter's response to the rebuke of Jesus. He was not bitter and resentful about it. He was humble and open to it. This would not be the first time that Jesus came down hard on him and told him things he did not want to hear. Can you remember the passage when Jesus told him, "O man of little faith!" as he sunk on the water? How about the description in the gospel that he didn't know what he was saying during the Transfiguration when he suggested to build three tents there with Jesus, Moises and Elijah? If Peter was keeping scores just as most of us do when we hear things that we don't want to hear, he might have acted out against Jesus or rebel against him. But he didn't.

We know that Jesus loves us too much to hide the hard truths even those we don't always want to hear in our lives. The Church, following Christ's example, continues to teach the truth of the Gospel, even though that truth is not always popular. This is not because the Church is power-hungry and tyrannical. This is because the Church of Christ, like Christ himself, loves every person deeply; it is the extension of Christ's own love for us. So if there is a teaching of the Church that is hard for us to accept, if there is a commandment that is difficult for us to understand, let us reflect on where these teaching and commandments are coming from and how are we responding to it, like Peter, always with humility and openness or like me to my Dad, at times with stubbornness and hardheadedness?

It was a risk for Christ to be so firm with Peter; it is a risk for the Church to be firm with us; it

was a risk for my Dad to be firm with me. But they are doing it because they love us. If we humbly take our medicine as Peter took his, we will not regret it. The road towards being a genuine disciple and witness of Jesus in the world start with the acknowledgement of the hard truths about ourselves, being open to the things that we don't want to hear in our lives and humbly persevering to work on becoming the best person we can be in our lives. Amen.