

## Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Aug 12th 2013

In examining today's Gospel reading, two major themes emerge. The first is the announcement by Jesus of his impending death and resurrection. This is the second time that Jesus mentions his death and resurrection; the first being met with a strong reaction and even denial from Peter (Mt 16:21-22), this second announcement being met more by grief than anything else. I am reminded of Kubler-Ross and how she discussed the human reaction to a life-altering or threatening event. Her five stages of reaction include: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Granted, not everyone experiences all of these or in this order, but I see Peter's reaction in this light. In Matthew 16:21-22, he actually denies this possibility and rebukes Jesus for saying that he would suffer and be killed. As time passes and Peter gets closer to Jesus, I wonder whether Peter and the other disciples have progressed toward a better understanding of Jesus' path toward resurrection. I don't necessarily think that Peter has accepted Jesus' fate, but wonder whether he has resigned himself to its eventual happening. Thus, we see Matthew highlighting Peter's "grief" associated with the announcement.

Life throws a lot at us – most good, but some not so. As frustrating as these events may be at times, I think we can take a lesson from Peter. We must remind ourselves that God has a reason. We may not understand and we may get distressed and even angry about these events or the current path, but we have to remind ourselves that it is part of God's plan. Possibly as we begin to accept his plan, we find solace in it.

The second theme from today's reading relates to the paying of the temple tax. Although "simple" at one level, I initially struggled to take meaning from Jesus' actions and message. The simple: When asked about who should pay the temple tax to the king, Jesus noted that the "foreigners" should pay with the subjects being exempt. Jesus did not see himself as being a subject of any earthly king and, thus, was neither foreigner nor subject. Despite this, Jesus believes he and Peter should pay the tax in order to support the temple and its functions, and to avoid controversy or scandal. I believe that Jesus is recommending that we follow the law as well as long as it does not conflict with God's teachings. Jesus then has Peter drop a hook and take a coin from the first fish that comes up, and to then pay the tax for both of them. This miracle, often cited as the only miracle he performed that "benefited" him, was a subtle or not-so-subtle way to demonstrate that despite paying the tax that he did rule the earth and all of creation.

So what does this mean? Jesus knew his mission and he did not let trivial matters such as paying the temple tax distract him or others from it. It is a reminder to all of us to stay focused on God and his teachings. Yes, we will be distracted by the trivial - even though at the time it may not seem so trivial; however, we must not let these distractions keep us from our mission to abide by the teachings of Jesus as he points our way to everlasting life.

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