

22nd Sunday per Annum - A
Jeremiah 20:7-9;
Romans 12:1-2;
Matthew 16:21-27
Little Flower - 9/3/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul challenges us, “*Do not conform yourselves to this age.*” Today this is a bigger challenge than ever before. Because of the various media, all day every day we are bombarded with messages about what is good, beautiful, and true. Most of us do not realize how much we are all influenced by the various media. For example, adults often mistakenly believe that they are not as affected by media as young people. On the other hand, two or three summers ago, I had dinner with a family with two daughters, one in high school and one in college. I asked the daughters where they get most of their information. Their father did not wait for them to answer: he held up a cell phone. We all know that much of what our society proclaims to be good, beautiful, and true is not good, beautiful, or true.

What can we do to protect ourselves and our children from false images of what is good, beautiful, and true? Typically the more we see or hear something, the more we tend to believe it is true. Although none of us are going to disconnect from media, I think families need to intentionally make time without any media. Families need to learn to openly discuss significant news and issues in search of the truth.

Today’s readings suggest several Scriptural ways to avoid conforming ourselves to this age. In today’s Gospel, when Jesus prophesies his passion, death, and resurrection, Peter rebukes Jesus. Jesus responded, “*Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.*” In today’s Gospel, Peter thought he understood God’s plan better than Jesus. Sometimes we are too sure that our thoughts and our ways—the thoughts and ways of today—are God’s thoughts and ways. It seems to me that if Peter could get things so wrong, we need to be very humble.

If we want to protect ourselves from conformity to this age, we need to take seriously Jesus’ words in the Gospel. Jesus tells us that we must imitate him: “*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*” In other words, like Jesus, we have to live for God and for others rather than for ourselves. However, Jesus also tells us that we have to make our own his attitudes and values: “*What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?*” We must put on Christ, i.e., become Christlike.

In the second reading, St. Paul also urges us to offer our “*bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.*” When we think of worship, we primarily think of church and Sunday Eucharist. St. Paul, however, is challenging us to pour out our lives in service to those in need. Spiritual worship is not simply what we do in church when we come together to celebrate Mass. Spiritual worship is what we do to and for others, especially those most in need. If we worship God through the Eucharist and through service, we will most certainly become Christlike.

At the same time, today’s reading from the Prophet Jeremiah suggests that if we really believe in Jesus, we will be passionate about sharing our faith. Sharing our Catholic Christian faith with others will help us avoid conformity to this age.

My brothers and sisters, what can we do to avoid conforming ourselves to this age? We need to disconnect from media at times and have serious conversations and discussions with family members and friends. We need to be humble, less sure that what we think and believe is the truth. We need to make our own the attitudes and values of Jesus and imitate his example in our lives. We need to offer ourselves as living sacrifices by serving the needs of others. Finally, we need to be passionate about our faith and share it with others.