

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel continues last Sunday's Gospel. In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus established the Church on Peter, the rock, after Peter's profession of faith. Immediately after this, Jesus prophesied his passion, death, and resurrection. Peter then took Jesus *"aside and began to rebuke him, 'God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.'* Jesus turned and said to Peter, *'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.'*"

As I mentioned in last Sunday's homily, this was one of three times when Jesus gives Peter a special role, mission, responsibility, or authority. Each time Peter immediately abused it.

In Luke's Gospel [22:31-34], at the Last Supper, Jesus said to Peter, *"'Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.'*" Peter immediately said, *"Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you."* Once again Jesus rebuked Peter, *"'I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me.'*"

In John's Gospel [21:15-22], during one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Three times Peter said yes. Three times Jesus told Peter, *"'Feed my lambs; feed my sheep.'*" Jesus then told Peter the kind of death he would die and said, *"'Follow me.'*" We are then told that *"Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved....When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me.'*"

In today's Gospel, Peter thought he knew better than Jesus what should happen. Sometimes we are too sure that our thoughts and our ways are God's thoughts and God's ways. In the passage from Luke, Peter overestimated his own strength and failed to recognize his dependence upon God. Sometimes we fail to recognize that none of us are self-made and that all that we are and have are gifts from God for which we need to be grateful. In the story from John, Jesus, in effect, told Peter that what would happen to John was none of his business. Sometimes we are more concerned with looking at the faults and sins of others than we are with looking at our own.¹ It seems to me that if Peter sometimes could get things so wrong, it is important that we be humble in matters of faith and religion. This *we* includes all of us, including the Pope, bishops, priests, and people.

My brothers and sisters, after prophesying his passion, death, and resurrection, Jesus told his disciples, *"'Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'*" Christians sometimes think that Jesus wants them to seek out crosses to carry, especially in the good times of life. I have never believed that. We all already have enough of our own crosses. I think it is fair to say that the pandemic has been a cross for all of us. For some people, it has been an oversized cross. Think of all the people who have become ill or lost loved ones. Think of all the people who have lost jobs and are struggling financially. Think of all the people who are suffering mentally, emotionally, or spiritually because of the pandemic. For some of us, the pandemic has been a small cross when we have not been able to do what we always do or what we want to do. Whether our cross is large or small, all Jesus is asking us to do is to do our best to deal with what the pandemic deals us with faith, love, and hope.

¹Hans Küng, *The Church* (London: Search Press, 1971), p.'s 474-476.