

22nd Ordinary Sunday
September 3, 2023
“ ‘Not Taken-in’ ”

Jer 20:7-9
Rom 12:1-2
Mt 16:21-27

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the challenges in living in any age is not to be “taken-in” by whatever is wrong in the contemporary culture. Each new generation brings new ideas, trends, and discoveries. Some are good and beneficial – Others are bad and very harmful.

Scientific discoveries can be viewed in much the same way. Many have been wonderful and for the benefit of the human race. Others have been detrimental and destructive.

Because something is possible and can be done – does not mean that it is good in itself or good for the human race.

Evil often appears as something good – And there are always those who try to seduce us into their way of thinking – their ideas – and their way of living. Furthermore, when many others “buy into” these things – it’s easy to be taken-in ourselves!

Examples in our own time include:

- Deification of the individual –
- Ego-Centeredness, Narcissism –
- Abortion –
- Euthanasia, Sterilization, In Vitro Fertilization –
- Contraception – the Objectification of Women –
- the Emasculation of Men –
- the LGBTQ+ Lifestyle – WOKE Behavior –
- Media Bias – Truth Distortion –
- Fear!

It is not surprising how fear can keep us from doing what we should. It can keep us from speaking out and confronting those who promote an ungodly agenda. And when we don’t speak out against what is evil and harmful – we are failing in our role as Christians and true disciples!

In the Old Testament scripture for today, Jeremiah is crying out to God. His lament is that he has been “taken-in” by God Himself! Jeremiah was called by God to warn the Chosen People of a forthcoming destruction. They had become idolatrous and hedonistic. They worshiped pagan gods and eroticism.

However, the people refused to listen. They were self-assured and complacent. So they ridiculed Jeremiah, persecuted him, and tried to kill him!

Nevertheless, Jeremiah refused to be silent – because he could not. God’s message of truth burned inside him and demanded proclamation! Sadly, all that Jeremiah said and predicted came to pass. This was a great misfortune for the Chosen People!

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus understands that his time is running out. He begins his final journey to Jerusalem. There, he will die for the truth that his Father sent him to reveal. He warns the disciples in order to prepare them for all that will take place – But they don’t want any part of it!

Peter, especially, has been “taken-in” by all the cultural expectations regarding the Messiah. Peter wanted a “theology of grace and glory”. Instead, Jesus gave him the theology of suffering and the cross. Jesus even calls Peter “Satan”! Peter is a great stumbling block of interference!

Then, Jesus tells them that if they want to be true disciples – they must take up their own crosses. They would have to die to all that feeds their fallen human nature. Consequently, whoever would try to save and preserve their material life would lose it and their soul. But if they would lose that material life for Jesus and his Gospel – they would truly find their soul-life. Thus, a life of suffering and the cross in this life – becomes a life of grace and glory in the next!

St. Paul certainly understood this in his Letter to the Romans. Our bodies were given to us from God. They are something we must love and care for according to God’s design and His will. The most wonderful thing we can do is offer our whole self as a gift to God. Thus, our humanity can become a living sacrifice. It is a gift made holy in our personal self-donation to our Creator. It is our resolve to live committed to God’s will, His ways, and His Commandments!

However, to do this is to resist the present age. It is to be non-conformist in the surrounding culture. It is to stand up and speak against today’s assumptions – against its false morality – its unnatural lifestyle – its ego-centrism – its fashions – its culture of deception and death!

Fortunately, God will always be there for us. God will “renew our minds” – He will teach us what is “good, and pleasing, and perfect”!

So, let us pray that we may never be “taken-in” by the powers of evil.

And may we always walk in the light of God’s goodness and love!

Amen.