

Deacon Mike Mocek

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Psalms 63

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 30, 2026

I would like to begin this morning (evening/afternoon) with sincere gratitude to everyone in this community for your prayers and other expressions of love and support for Betty and me following my medical emergency and surgery in Europe a few weeks ago. Never have I known of so many people praying for me. Believe me, by your prayers, I truly felt the hand of God guiding me and my caregivers through that ordeal. Have you ever felt good about your relationship with someone who had responsibility over you – maybe a teacher, a supervisor, or a parent – only to have the rug pulled out from under you when you least expected it? It has happened to me more times than I care to count, perhaps most notably during deacon formation. There were times when I thought I was sailing through the program with flying colors until feedback from an instructor or an administrator made me feel like I was on the verge of failure. Fortunately for me, Deacon Joe Milligan had prepared me for those ups and downs, and he advised me more than once to stay focused on the journey no matter where it might seem to be leading. Many of us have encountered similar circumstances at various times in our lives. Those experiences, in a small way, could give us some insight into how the Prophet Jeremiah must have felt about his relationship with God and how Peter must have felt about his relationship with Jesus. Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet. He accepted the call and proclaimed God's word faithfully. Yet he became so distraught over rejection of his prophecies by the Jewish people that he accused God of deceiving him. In last week's Gospel, we heard Jesus ask his disciples, "...who do you say that I am?" Peter

answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus was obviously pleased. He said no human had revealed that answer to Peter. It came from his heavenly Father. Jesus called Peter "blessed" and a "rock" upon which he would build his church. But see how quickly things changed. Today we heard an entirely different dialogue. In the very next verse from the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, Jesus reveals to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer greatly, be killed, and then be raised on the third day. Peter is shocked. "God forbid," he says, "No such thing shall ever happen to you." And Jesus replies to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me." Jesus goes on to teach about the cost of discipleship, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Let's not misinterpret what Jesus is saying here. He does not wish suffering on anyone. His entire ministry was devoted to relieving all kinds of suffering. But we must acknowledge that this life is filled with "crosses." Jesus invites us to take up whatever "crosses" come our way with the same trust in God with which he took up the cross on which he died.

Remaining faithful to Jesus as we carry our crosses unites us with him and the cross that he carried. That is what he meant when he said, "follow me." We cannot live our lives exactly as Jesus lived his. That would be impossible. For us, following Jesus means capturing within our own circumstances the essence of who he was and how he lived his life on earth. As Saint Paul wrote in our second reading from his letter to the Romans, it means discerning the will of God – not conforming to the norms of our time, but doing what is good and pleasing and perfect. Jesus worked untiringly for justice – challenging the social, political, religious, and economic injustices of his day. The religious and political leaders of that time saw him as a threat to their power. Their solution was to get rid of him. In ancient times, the prophet Jeremiah worked for justice, and he suffered

ridicule and persecution at the hands of his religious leaders. In more recent times, Sister Maura Clark, Jean Donovan, Sister Ita Ford, Sister Dorothy Kazel, and Archbishop Oscar Romero were all murdered in El Salvador while working for justice. Blessed Stanley Rother was murdered in Guatemala while working for justice. And Dr. Martin Luther King was murdered in the United States while working for justice. Working for justice involves speaking truth to power, and that is a cross that sometimes results in death. But we are not all called to be martyrs. We can take up our crosses and follow Jesus with the everyday choices we make in our more mundane lives. When we encounter people with different backgrounds or lifestyles, we can choose inclusion rather than exclusion. We can foster hope in the face of doubt. We can choose forgiveness over alienation. We can cultivate community rather than individualism. We can advocate for healing over brokenness. And we can nurture love to overcome injustice. Jesus calls us to make our choices freely, to bear our crosses, and to follow him. We have only one decision. How will we respond?