

Homily for August 29, 1999  
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Matthew 16:21-27  
Jeremiah 20:7-9  
Romans 12:1-2

## *Dare we get behind Jesus and follow him?*

Good old Saint Peter, despite evidence to the contrary, he was not a bumbling idiot who consistently put his foot in his mouth. He speaks for all persons of faith who want God's great power to prevent suffering. He knows that Jesus is the Messiah, but he doesn't understand the cost of messiahship or of discipleship.

When Jesus is tempted in the desert, he says, "Away with you, Satan!" Here, in Matthew 16, Peter is also rebuked, but unlike Satan, he is not commanded to go away, but rather to "get behind me," a Semitic expression meaning to follow. In the very moment of reprimand, then, Peter is called to a deeper experience of following, to a more profound discipleship and of learning that such following will always include the cross.

Aren't we a bit like Saint Peter in our reluctance and fear in the face of the cross? – especially when the Pope and the bishops ask us to evangelize, even to go door to door and tell of Jesus Christ?...which is what we do in our Mission Outreach. I know I balked at the prospect at first. "I'm not a street preacher," I said to myself. But what I found, as did so many who participated in whatever way they could, was that I

was the one transformed, evangelized, made new. Not everyone feels able to go door to door, but everyone can offer something – prayer, fasting, certainly we've been signing up in grand style. In your pews today you'll find Our Missionary Outreach Prayer Card and a copy of our Missionary Outreach Job Descriptions which detail a host of support opportunities.

Let's look for a moment at how we might follow the Lord Jesus, share his cross which leads to a life richer than we could have dreamed.

*Refer to Missionary Outreach – Job Descriptions*

This in a nutshell is how we're trying to follow Jesus-with all the fear and trepidation it entails. Peter does "get behind" Jesus but does not give up because of his failure. He follows to Jerusalem, even though he fears. He follows to Gethsemane, even though he sleeps there. He follows to the Passion, even though he hides. He waits for Christ in the upper room, even though he is shamed by his betrayals. We're trying to be like Peter. It's how we're trying to be a parish, and each and every one of us is a part of it in some way. In your pew you will find a sign-up sheet on which you can indicate the ways you would like to help support Our Mission Outreach effort. – You can fill these out today and put them in the basket in the back of the church, – or you can take them home to check your schedules, then fill

them out and put them in the collection basket the next two weekends. If you have questions, someone will be in the back of the church to help you after mass. Above all, pray for the efforts our parish is making to bring the faith to the world around us – all of us will be the better for it.

The early chronicles of the Franciscans tell of a great gathering of friars at the time of Saint Francis. A small group of brothers was being commissioned to spread the Gospel in the pagan land of Germany where those who would hear their preaching were known to be unfriendly, even hostile. Everyone expected these brothers to suffer martyrdom. Many friars crowded around, offering encouragement, all the while secretly hoping later to say they had met such saintly martyrs. One rather timid friar, Brother Jordan of Giano, made his way forward. He, too, hoped some of the glory of the martyrs-to-be would rub off. Much to his surprise, as he gave one of them a fraternal embrace, the friar said, “So, Brother Jordan, you too, will come with us?” Jordan was petrified. He recoiled from the thought of torture and a painful death. Then came the thought: What if it was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that he go? He finally took his dilemma to Francis himself, who advised Jordan to follow his heart. Brother Jordan decided to overcome his fear and accompany the missionaries. While he never became a martyr, he was the one who chronicled the exploits of the early friar-missionaries from Italy to Germany.

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