

CONFLICTING SNAPSHOTS OF OUR LIVES

Jeremiah 15. 15-21

Romans 12. 9-21

Matthew 16. 21-28

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The more time I spend reflecting on my life, the more I realise that the things I say and do in regard to others, and my reactions to particular situations, say a lot more about *me* than they do about the other person or situation. And I think that this is true for Peter in today's gospel. His reaction to our Lord says a lot more about Peter than it does about Jesus.

It's not too difficult to see and understand what's going on with Peter. He's scared; he feels overwhelmed; and he feels unprepared for what's coming. I can easily imagine Peter thinking to himself, 'You know, when I signed up to fish for other people, this is not what I had in mind. Great suffering, rejection and death? That was never in my plan.' Peter is struggling with his faith, trying to make sense of what he really believes, wondering if he has what it takes to meet the demands of faith in this moment.

We all know what all that's like, don't we? We've all stood next to Peter, haven't we? We've known times in our lives when we felt unprepared for what we were facing. We've looked down the road at what was coming and haven't liked what we saw. For all of us, there have been times when we just didn't know whether our faith was up to the demands of life.

Imagine taking a snapshot of your life in one of those moments. What would it show? Would you like what you see? Is it a picture that you would want to frame and keep, or would you actually prefer to throw it away? I know that when those

overwhelming moments come, I'm often not at my best; and I don't like those pictures of me or my life. And I'll bet you don't either. They are the kinds of pictures that we would delete from the albums of our lives if we could.

And yet we all have those kinds of pictures in our lives. We've all looked at bad pictures of ourselves, pictures that show us to be less than or other than we know ourselves to be, or to want to be.

There is, however, *more to us* than one picture can show. I suspect that we know that; but we just don't live it. We're too quick to see that one picture, that one snapshot in time, as descriptive and representative of who we are and what our life is like. We take that one photograph of ourselves and say, 'This is me. This is my life. This is all there will ever be.' We hold up that picture as a final judgement or description of ourselves. And sometimes we take those kinds of photographs *of others* and hold them up *to them* and say, 'Look at what you did. This is who you are. This is how I will always see you.'

But can a single snapshot really tell the whole story? No. Life is more like a movie, an ongoing story that is active, dynamic, changing and unpredictable. There is more to Peter than the snapshot we are given in today's gospel; and there's more to you and me than those snapshots that we want to rip out of our life's album. Every snapshot exists within a larger story. That's true for Peter; and it's true for you and me.

Look carefully at our gospel passage. Peter takes Christ aside and rebukes him. Then our Lord turns, rebukes Peter and calls him Satan. Jesus says, 'Peter, you are the deceiver. You are the adversary. You are the tempter. You are out of line. Get behind me.' Do you really believe that this one picture is all there is to Peter? I don't. Only six verses earlier, Peter shows himself to be the one who recognises

Christ for who he is. Peter confesses, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ (16. 16). Those two pictures are of the *very same man*.

I could give you other conflicting snapshots of Peter: the day when he stepped out of the boat, full of faith, walking on water; and then just a moment later, when he was sinking, scared and crying for help. Or how about the picture of Peter as the rock on which our Lord will build his church? Set that one next to the picture of the cock crowing Peter’s three denials of Jesus. And I’m sure that Peter would like to lose that snapshot of him sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Christ prayed; he would rather replace it with another photo, the one that shows our Lord saying to Peter, ‘Feed my lambs, tend my sheep’.

It’s not just Peter who has conflicting or contradictory pictures in his life. We all do. But what if we took those snapshots of life for what they really are? What if we looked at them as simply one moment in time, a single still frame that is part of our life’s movie? What if that one picture isn’t a final judgement, but simply a photo revealing what was happening in us at that time: revealing our fears, our wounds, our hopes, our needs, our struggles? What if that picture is just a snapshot of us at a particular time and place, trying to do the best we could with what we had?

And what if there is always more to that picture than what we often see? It would be so easy to look at the snapshot of Peter in today’s gospel and say that he just blew it. He was not a good disciple. He was out of line when he rebuked Jesus. What if Christ’s rebuke of Peter, the sting of being called Satan, was really our Lord saying, ‘Peter, that’s not who you are. I know you. You are more than what you have become in this moment. Wake up. Claim your beloved-ness. Trust my calling of you. Return to yourself.’

Every picture has more than one interpretation. We can look at those snapshots of our lives and let them bind us to the past. We can let them for ever label us and judge us or another person. Or we can look at them and say, 'Wow, that was a terrible picture day. That's really not me and it's not who I want to be;' and we can let those pictures call us back to ourselves, back to our true centre. We can let those bad pictures call us into a new life and a new way of being.

That's what Jesus is doing with Peter today; and it's what he is continually doing with us. Christ is continually calling us back to ourselves, letting us see ourselves through his eyes, reminding us of who we truly are and of who we can become.

Most of the time, we look at those pictures and we know that we've stepped outside ourselves and that we've betrayed ourselves. We feel shame, disappointment or regret. Those pictures are not about punishment or judgement. They reveal that we have touched the darkness within ourselves; but they do not show our permanent condition. They are the pointers to something else; they are reminders that there is more than what can be shown in a single photograph.

As much as we might like to hide, delete or photoshop those pictures, they have some value for us. The very things that haunt us can become our teachers. The very things that we don't want to hear about ourselves can become a calling into a new life. The very things that we do not want to see about our lives can point us to a different way of being.

Maybe we should gather up those photographs that we want to throw away and look at them one more time, but this time with the eyes of our Lord, and look for what we've not seen before: the beauty hidden within disfigurement; the light that shines in the darkness; the healing that comes from great suffering; the belonging that

overcomes rejection; the life that arises from death; the hope that stands amidst despair.

It's not the snapshots of our life that define us. It is Jesus. It is the love of Christ that sees in us more than we often see in ourselves or one another.

Amen.