

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 16:21-27

Many of us have a favorite sports team, singer, and perhaps even a politician. Being in the Diocese of Cleveland, I think it's safe to assume that many of you like the Indians, the Cavs, and/or the Browns. Naturally, when you favor a sports team, many of you go to their games or buy their jerseys or other team memorabilia. For those of you who like a particular singer, such as Celine Dion, Faith Hill, or Taylor Swift, you listen to their music and go to their concerts. For those who admire certain politicians, you support them and spend your time listening to them. When we talk about these people or teams, we usually say "I am a big fan of so-and-so." People expect these stars and teams to fulfill their desires and expectations, but when they disappoint their fans, some people start searching for others to admire.

Last Sunday, we heard Peter's great profession of faith;

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus replied;

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah."

However, in today's gospel, Jesus rebukes Peter;

"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.

You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

In Jesus' lifetime, many Jews were looking and waiting for the Messiah, who would become the savior of Israel, about whom the prophets proclaimed and foretold. However, the people's expectation of the Messiah was quite different from the prophets' expectation of the Messiah. The prophets spoke of the Messiah as the Lamb of God led to the slaughter or the suffering servant of God. Simultaneously during Jesus' lifetime, Israel was under Roman occupation and the Jews suffered under Roman rule. This is partially why they longed for the Messiah who would come in glory, free Israel from the grips of Roman control, and liberate the Jews. This was the Messiah they needed.

Peter was no different. He had the same expectation of Jesus. He believed in Jesus Christ and followed him, but Peter expected Jesus, the Messiah, to conquer and reign, not to be killed. So when Jesus told Peter

about His passion and crucifixion, Peter was surprised. Since a suffering, dying Messiah was unacceptable to him, Peter protested. Then Jesus rebuked him with harsh words.

It is not easy to understand God sometimes. It often seems like God does not answer our prayers and does not fulfill our needs. When we undergo difficult trials (and we will all experience them at some point in our lives), God sometimes “disappoints us.” In turn, we sometimes blame Him and get angry at Him. We do this because we mold the image of God into our own expectations and image. However, God is much greater and far beyond any of our human notions of Him. He knows what would truly be good for us for our own sake and cares for us in His own unique, providential way. As long as we stay *in* His love and stay in love *with* Him, He will eventually bring good out of our sufferings and problems.

In today’s gospel, Jesus even calls Peter “Satan and an obstacle.” Indeed, our human expectations of God could be dangerous because they could lure us away from His care and love. To combat this tendency, Jesus warns us all that we cannot and should not limit God’s providence by only being open to what we expect He is going to give us, or what we want Him

to give us. Jesus urges us to believe in God's care in the difficult moments of our lives, and calls us to stay in His love.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, may we keep this in mind; Following Jesus Christ is not about our desires, expectations, or satisfactions. It is all about submitting ourselves to God's will. It is all about loving God with all our hearts, with all our being, with all our strength, and with all our mind. Sometimes, there will be times that it seems like God is not answering our prayers. There will be times that it seems like God does not care about our issues and problems. When we go over these speed bumps of life, may we trust in God's mercy and stay in His love. As Jesus offered Himself to the Father on the Cross, may we take up our Crosses of pain, suffering, anxiety, and loneliness, and offer them up to God, the Father of mercies. Then he will ease our burdens, grant us peace of heart and mind, and lead us to eternal happiness in His bosom.

“Come follow me, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)

