

11th Sunday after Pentecost, 28/8/2011, Holy Trinity

Matthew 16:21-28

Last Sunday Fr. Brian was very serious in his exposition of the Gospel reading for the day in which Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah.

Such an acclamation is serious business for us and the church at large.

At the same time I could see a bit of fun in the narrative.

Jesus was asking his disciples what was the gossip that was going around about him.

It was a bit of fun for the disciples because Jesus affirmed their faith and even played with Simon's name and gave him the nickname of Peter, the rock man.

We can hear that story and be affirmed in our faith and our belonging to the church, the body of Christ that has come down from that time.

Today's gospel narrative follows last week's reading and is not much fun.

We hear Jesus telling Peter and the disciples the sacrificial cost of what they must do to carry out God's will for all people.

This is the sacrificial cost of what they must do as the body of Christ.

This is the sacrificial cost of what Jesus must do as he sets out for Jerusalem.

"There I will be killed and after three days will rise again", says Jesus.

Peter again takes the initiative and says, in effect, we won't let this happen.

"We will protect you. We will make sure that people accept you. We will not allow you to die."

Peter did not understand the leadership style and the lowliness of Jesus.

This brings a rebuke from Jesus and what a rebuke it is from calling Simon the rock on which Jesus would build his church to Satan.

Jesus knows it is through his life, suffering, death on the cross and resurrection that he saves us and brings us into a way of life that knows God's forgiveness, love and grace.

God's forgiveness, love and grace are given unconditionally, with no strings attached.

In his death Jesus overcomes the power of sin. Sin has no longer a death grip over us.

Christ makes it clear that God will forgive the sins we confess with a clear desire to renew our lives.

We are precious in his sight and are worth dying for.

But he also calls us to follow him all the way to Jerusalem.

We are to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him.

This is to put aside our own needs and to allow ourselves to be loved and to love.

We give and receive that love without attempting to manipulate that love for the purpose of gaining and exercising power over others.

God's love and forgiveness sets us free to love, to serve and to give in ways that exhibit the characteristics of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

I don't see much fun in today's narrative.

There is not much fun in making confession of our sins, in taking up our cross and following Jesus all the way to Jerusalem.

There is, however, good news coming out of it.

Being a disciple of Jesus is not always easy but the good news is that we have the resources to do whatever we must do to make the necessary sacrifices in order that God's work may be done.

God wants to do great things through his cross-bearing church.

God wants to do great things through us as we remember another aspect of the good news and that is, "Jesus is with us" "always".