

**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**September 13-14, 2009**  
**St. John the Evangelist Parish**  
**Deacon James J. Benjamin**

*Isaiah 50: 5-9a Psalm 59 James 2: 14-18 Mark 8: 27-35*

Recently I've begun cutting myself when I slice bagels for breakfast so my wife kindly bought me a bagel-slicer, called a guillotine, so that I don't do myself further damage.

This device works great and, I think, is idiot-proof, but, to be on the safe side, it comes with a set of directions, as does just about every device on the market today.

Here's what you do to get optimal performance;

here's how to clean and maintain it;

usually with well-worded directions and often accompanying pictures.

The readings for today are a bit like those directions,

though not quite as clear-cut and unambiguous

as the advice that came with my guillotine.

Jesus rebukes Peter for thinking as humans do, not as God does;

in other words, Peter seems to be quite unaware of how God wants us to think.

The Creator has supplied directions for his creation

in the form of Jesus,

who reveals God to the disciples and to us.

Here is how to think, here is how to act,

in order to be happy and to be fulfilled.

The first reading also, from the book of Isaiah,

also has some clues about how God thinks

and how he would like us to behave.

The catch is that God's way of thinking and behaving,

the manner in which he would like us to think and act,

is not easy or natural for us,

at least in the beginning.

In our humanness we want to do things our way,

and not necessarily God's way.

We want our will to be done,

even though we pray often,

"Thy will be done."

In the selection from Isaiah,

the prophet writes what has been labeled as one of the Suffering Servant songs.

Some think that Jesus, in his familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures,

realized that he, himself, had been sent from God as the Suffering Servant

of whom Isaiah speaks.

This servant is attentive to God's voice speaking in his ear  
and he follows that voice,  
knowing that God is his help.  
No matter how much he is vilified by people,  
spat upon and mistreated,  
he continues to set his face like flint, like stone,  
and to persevere in following God's will, not his own.  
We see Jesus always attentive to what the Father wants him to do,  
and we observe his rock-solid determination to carry out God's plan.

Isaiah also is secure in that no matter what people do to him  
he can count on God not to desert him.  
God is his help; God is our help.

The Suffering Servant, is tempted to rebel, to turn back,  
but he does not give in.  
We know about those kinds of temptations too:  
it's hard living the life of a Christian,  
always turning the other cheek, forgiving all the insults  
and all the ways in which we've been taken advantage of.  
We're tempted to act the same,  
to get what we want, no matter what,  
even if it means that we manipulate others.  
We're not really willing to be criticized;  
we want to stand up for ourselves,  
and, if we consider that we've been insulted or abused, then give it right back!  
No one can put it over on us!  
But this is not how God wants us to behave.  
If we were a product, our set of operating instructions  
would definitely NOT say:  
for best results act selfishly, retaliate to anyone who has harmed you,  
always think of yourself and your ego first!

And sometimes we do succeed in living according to the way God has in mind for us,  
and we usually know it afterwards;  
there is satisfaction and a deep pleasure when we're walking on the right path.  
But the temptation to slip back and let our ego take over is always a danger.  
Jesus, fully human as we are, is also tempted to stop following God's will for him,  
to put aside those operating principles that God intended for Jesus to live by:  
caring for others, forgiving whatever evil was done to him,  
persisting in his mission to reconcile, to save, to heal,  
no matter how discouraged he got,  
and no matter how alone he felt.

Peter seems to have been influenced by Satan  
to get Jesus to turn back from the path to Jerusalem,

where extreme suffering and death await him.  
Jesus then scathingly rebukes Peter for not thinking as God wants him to think,  
but as humans think.  
Peter must have wondered what hit him.  
Wasn't Jesus proud of him that only he knew the right answer about Jesus' identity?  
What was so wrong about trying to save Jesus from a horrible death?

And can't we relate to Peter?  
Wouldn't we protest to Jesus, much as he did?  
Jesus, you can't talk about dying, about suffering.  
there's so much work to be done!  
And what will we do without you?  
We can't make it without you! You can't die!

It sounds so reasonable to say what Peter has said,  
but Jesus rebukes him harshly,  
calling him Satan.  
Jesus understands what he must do,  
how God wants him to think and how to behave.  
Peter is trying to block his path,  
his saving mission.  
Peter is working from different operating instructions than those from God.

Our challenge is to try and look at our way of thinking  
and see if it has anything to do with God's way.  
You may say, "how can we possibly know how God thinks?"  
And it's true that God's ways are not ours,  
and we cannot imagine what God is really like  
nor the immensity of his goodness, love and mercy.  
But I would argue that Jesus does reveal to us much about how God thinks.  
Jesus is the one who reveals his Father to us,  
and when we follow him we are lead to the Father.  
If we can follow Jesus, we will be following the operating instructions,  
if you will, of the Creator to his creation.  
Act this way, think this way, follow Jesus  
and you will be happy, fulfilled, have everything you want  
and spend eternity in heaven.

But as humans we want to go our own way,  
we want to avoid taking a stand about our faith.  
Who wants to take up a cross anyway?

Who wants to lose his life?  
We would like to have more of everything and not lose anything,  
especially our lives which are so precious.  
God's way is paradoxical for us; not common sense at all.

The truth is that we cannot clutch life, possessions or anything else; they will slip through our fingers.

To gain everything we want we have to be willing to let go of our needs, our wants, our way of doing things.

To obtain life, we must be willing to offer it up.

To be loved, to be known, to experience intimacy with our friends and family we must love them,

give ourselves unselfishly to others,

stop complaining about how unfair life has been to us

and accept what we've been given;

carry our cross, in other words.

We need to keep reminding ourselves, as Isaiah says, that God is our help.

God is the one on whom we can rely.

If we are willing to let go of our need to control every outcome,

and make things turn out the way we know they should,

in the end we will preserve our life, our happiness and our wholeness.

The Gospel today challenges you and me

to think as God does.

Our Creator knows what will bring us happiness and satisfaction,

and it lies in following his Son

and in living as a disciple: forgiving, healing, listening, serving,

and, perhaps most of all, in trusting that God's way is the correct way

and the path of eternal life.