

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (8/30-31/2008)

Jeremiah 20/7-9, Psalm 63, Romans 12/1-2, Matthew 16/21-27

Take me to your leader!

The leader is Peter and he is messing up again – big time.

To his great credit, Peter was the first in Matthew's Gospel to declare his faith and trust in Jesus as the Messiah, the one sent by God, but he couldn't stand prosperity.

This time, he contradicts Jesus on what was one of Jesus' most important declarations.

When Jesus announces that he has to go to Jerusalem and face the music, eventual death, Peter takes him aside for a little heart-to-heart.

If it weren't such a serious moment, the scene would be almost comical

"God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."

Thank you, Peter; we're sure you mean well.

Jesus "turns on" Peter – a term that means he really laid into the suddenly quavering apostle.

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

That's the equivalent of telling Peter to go to hell!

It's also – if you take it literally – a call for Peter to get back in line in his attempts to follow Jesus.

Jesus reserves his most ferocious calling out for the one man whom he had made head of the fledgling faith community.

The first Vicar of Christ on earth, the first pope! What a spectacle!

This business of following Jesus is no picnic – as Peter found out to his great dismay.

Jeremiah, a prophet who lived six centuries before Jesus, knew the price of discipleship.

He cried out: *"You duped me, Lord, and I let myself be duped."*

Jeremiah goes on to tell how, as a prophet of the Lord, he had been subject to derision, criticism, persecution and hatred.

He's so upset that he vows not to ever again speak for the Lord, but he's caught.
God's word "*becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones!*"

Whatever God wants, God gets.

When Jesus says he has to go up to his eventual destiny in Jerusalem, it will happen.

What all this seems to be saying is that God's way is certain, but it is not the easy way.

That's as true for us in the twenty-first century as it was for Jeremiah and poor Peter.

Now that the Olympics are over for another four years, stories linger about the athletes and the tremendous sacrifices they make to be the best at their sports.

All for a few precious moments on the stage, and then back to anonymity for most of them.

Jesus says that "*whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself (herself), take up his cross and follow me.*"

That's a pretty straightforward statement, and it holds without exception for all.

The Olympic Games help us to understand the cost of discipleship, but ultimately it's not about gold, silver or bronze medals.

It's about the salvation of our very lives.