

Homily, 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time "A"
SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis
August 27 - 28, 2011
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The word "value" is common in our living. We look for values when we shop. We like to promote values in our educational systems. We put money into institutions and programs that support our personal and corporate values. It's good for us to reflect on our values from time to time because our values influence how we make decisions and organize our lives.

Success is a value. Everyone wants to be successful in one way or another. We hope children can grow up and be successful. However, is there something even more important than success? Is there another value that should demand our attention? Jesus teaches us today that being authentic is more important than being successful.

Peter, who in last week's Gospel was declared by Jesus to be the rock of the church's foundation, is this week called "Satan" and chastised by Jesus rather severely for putting his agenda for success ahead of Jesus' agenda for embracing the Cross and doing the Father's will. The one who was to be the rock now becomes the stumbling stone. At issue were two colliding agendas. No doubt with the best of intentions, Peter wants Jesus' mission and his own discipleship to be a smashing success. After all, they left everything to follow Christ.

Jesus' emphasis on the Cross is the way of becoming authentic. It is the Father's will for all of us. This past week I was in Philadelphia giving a retreat for a religious community known as the Norbertines. One of the local pastors took me one afternoon to his newly built church for a "look - see". It was quite beautiful. There was one distinctive feature that I've

never seen before in any new church. The Stations of the Cross were portrayed however in each Stational depiction there appeared one of the saints as a part of the scene. Each saint included had in one way or another taken up his or her Cross to follow Jesus on his own way to the Cross. For example, St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Franciscan Friar who exchanged his life for that of another prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp was next to Jesus in one Station. St. Teresa of Calcutta was in another. Matt Talbot, the Irish recovering alcoholic who helped so many of his suffering brothers and sisters in their own addiction was present in one of the Stations. Like these holy men and women, each of us should be found in Christ's journey to the Cross because it is our journey as well. It is the path to becoming authentic human persons. It was the Prophet Jeremiah's struggle knowing that God's love was burning in his heart. Success may or may not be achieved, but eternal salvation will be awarded as promised in our Baptism.

To be a successful disciple might even entail rejection. Ultimately, Peter himself would be rejected and crucified for the sake of Christ. Our own discipleship may have to forego worldly success and risk rejection for taking unpopular stands on important issues. Of many, one issue that comes to mind is that of Life. It is popular and even success producing among some politicians to claim they are opposed to abortion, but fully supportive of capital punishment. This, of course, is inconsistent with Catholic teaching that demands we respect all of life from conception to natural death. It is, as the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago taught us, a seamless garment just like the one that Christ wore all the way to the Cross.

A second issue is of vocation. Marriage, priesthood, the committed or vowed single life, or religious life all demand taking a stand for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Long after the wedding flowers wilt and the Ordination vestments begin to fade, our respective vocational commitments continue to demand that we continue to die to self and live for one another in the name of the Lord Jesus. Recently, I ran across a cable channel that was featuring four brides critiquing each other's weddings. Some were beautifully arranged in pavillions with huge palm trees, or glorious old theatres of days gone by. I noticed that none of the four chose to be married in a church or religious assembly. In all four cases, each couple composed their own vows, and God wasn't mentioned once. The difference between secular and sacred marriage is the the difference between two and three. God is present in a faith marriage. The love of the spouses originated in God, brought the couple together and will bond them together through thick and thin.

Priesthood and religious life is the same. The priest can be tempted to search for succes by the number of baptisms he performs, or the amount of money he raises. However, priestly and rellgious success is to be found in the manner in which the priest, sister or brother follows Christ to the Cross each day. Frequently, there is nothing glamorous about this. In fact, the priest may need to take a stand that is quite unpopular in the secular world, but important for the authenticity of the Gospel.

Today, Christ reminds us of the call to be authentic. This will call for a regular reflection on the nature of our values of faith, hope and charity. It may call for us to relinquish our personal agendas in favor of the agenda of Christ Jesus. A sure place to find this agenda is at the foot of the Cross.

As we make our way around the church and observe the Stations of the Cross, can we see in any of them our own image at least in the background? Christ calls us to join Him on the only path to success that matters, the path to the Cross.