

**Personal Commitment and Hope**    Twenty-fifth Week in Ordinary Time    Friday,  
September 28, 2018    Eccl 3:1-11;    **Lk 9:18-22**    (St. Wenceslaus, martyr; St. Lawrence  
Ruiz and Companions, martyrs)    Healing Mass    (Jesus acted in ways completely different  
from what the people were led to believe was going to happen.)

This reading from Luke is very instructive. First of all, it says Jesus was praying in solitude, but his disciples were with him. Well, when I pray in solitude there is no one there with me, at least physically. This means that **Jesus had brought his disciples into his solitude**. There is a way we can do that. **We can enter into the solitude of another**, and that's what Jesus was doing here, allowing them to be part of his solitude.

But then for them to share more deeply, he now gives them an opportunity to express their beliefs. But he begins with scuttlebutt. He says, **"Who do people say that I am?"** He probably actually said, "Who do people say the Son of Man is? Some translations say that. It's likely that he referred to himself not as "I," but as the Son of Man, looking at himself in the third person. Who do people say this guy is? And there are **three very interesting answers, all of which imply reincarnation**, which normally we don't think of as Jewish: **John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the ancient prophets**—interesting, but wrong.

So then he says now, "What do you commit yourself to?" There's a time when if we are going to be disciples, we have to commit ourselves. We can't just talk about what other people say, even what the Church teaches. That's not enough. We may start by being dutiful students of Church teaching; that's okay to start. But eventually there's a time for commitment. And it has to be personal. We do not know God the way we know facts that we might read in a book or hear from someone else. **We know God in a very personal way and to relate to God requires a personal commitment**. And so he says, **"Who do you say that I am?"**

**Peter speaks up and says, "You are the Christ."** You are the Messiah. You are the anointed one. What's very interesting is **"He rebuked them."** Well, we say Jesus is the Christ. We celebrate that he is the Messiah. So why would he rebuke them and direct them not to tell this to anyone—why? Well words are words, but words and titles and concepts may lead us astray. **What did Peter mean when he said, "You are the Christ"?** What did he mean by that? Or you are the Messiah, or you are the anointed one? What he would have meant is something Jesus was not. And so "he rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone," because what people thought **the term Christ referred to was an anointed, Davidic ruler, a triumphal, victorious ruler**.

Now eventually we do believe that Jesus could be called a triumphant ruler, but not then. Then he was on his way to Jerusalem, and he said, **"The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."** This is his mission, and we of course understand this to some degree. And now when we talk about the Christ or the Messiah or the anointed, this is what we mean. But that's not what Peter meant. Peter had something else in mind, as did all the apostles, which is why they argued about who was more important, which is why James and John's mother came to Jesus and asked that her sons sit one at his right and one at his left because she is thinking of reigning. Well ultimately what God has prepared for us we cannot describe with human words. So even **words like reigning and**

**ruling and triumphing and being victorious**, these words are a little bit off, because they are describing our world. They **are not really describing God's plans or God's purpose.**

**Now we have to really think about this. God has become human and yet in his humanity must suffer greatly. Why?** I cannot explain it in words. **You somehow need to think about this, reflect upon it, and in a way answer it from within your own suffering.**

“Be rejected”—**why must the Incarnate Word of God be rejected?** I would say that is because the world is full of people with free will and God is not going to force anybody to accept him. And **there are many who freely use their wills to go against God.** That's one reason we have so much trouble in our world; in fact it is the reason, the only one I can think of offhand why we have so many problems in our world. The world is beautifully created. It's richly endowed. We human beings are also endowed, not only with free will, but with creativity and intelligence, and we have so much ability we could have an absolutely splendid life on earth for every single person, but we don't. This is the extraordinary thing about God's love however, that **even though the Word Incarnate experiences rejection, God never lets go of his own love because that is the very nature of God.** God pursues every single creature with this love.

Now whether it's possible for anyone to utterly and finally reject God, I don't know. Logically it is possible. Whether anyone ever will, I don't know. **Pope John Paul II made it very clear that we don't know if there's any souls eternally lost;** we don't know that. We don't know that Judas was lost. We don't know that Pontius Pilate was lost. We don't know if Adolf Hitler was lost. We don't know; God has not revealed it. Logically it's possible for people to reject God, but, on the other hand, **God pursues us with such undying ardor maybe people give in universally to this love of God.**

Meanwhile, however, the Son of Man in his actual, historic life was rejected by the elders, the authorities, the chief priests and the scribes, the theologians, the people who knew what was what, because he didn't fit into the Scriptures, even though later Christians will say how he fulfilled Scriptures in many ways, but also he didn't. He did, and he didn't. **He acted in ways completely different from what the people were led to believe was going to happen.**

So when Peter spoke up, what he said, although verbally we might agree with him, but actually what he meant was different from what actually turns out to be the case. And in so many ways how Jesus lived, how he died, how he suffered, all this was not foreseen by and large in the Scriptures. An odd reference of this prophet or that has been used to show how Jesus fulfilled prophecy, but in general the picture they had of what God was doing was different from what Jesus did. So that's another lesson we have to keep in mind, that **we cannot know or foreknow what God is doing in our lives.** The rejection that the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes did was because they were looking for something else. Does that happen to us? **Are we looking for something else than what God is really giving us, something different from what God is really doing in our lives?**

“And be killed”—yes even death. “Jesus does not deem quality with God something to be grasped,” but lets go, pours himself out, “accepts death itself, even death on the cross.” **His life is a life of giving up and pouring out,** not accumulating, not gathering in, not saving, but letting go and giving away all that he was.

“And on the third day be raised,” and of course this is the most important thing of all. **If it were not for the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no Christian Church.** Nobody would ever follow someone whose end was on the cross and that was that, and there was no further chapter. No, Jesus was followed precisely because on the third day he was raised. And that becomes the most important horizon for our lives, that we **keep in mind that the travails of the present age are nothing in comparison to what God is preparing for those who love him**, that in some way is seen in the resurrection of Christ, but not fully understood, even by the apostles, by Mary Magdalene, by those who experienced it first hand; they still didn’t quite understand it, and no one ever has, except those who have been taken up into the glory of God.

So we have to keep in mind always the importance of hope. **It is hope that shines its light before us, leading us and helping us through the present darkness;** and there are many forms of darkness. So this gospel reading is given to us to help us to see and to commit and to understand the reason for hope, that we can let **God work in our lives God’s way, and not block his work with our own ideas of what should be.**