

**Reflection for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**August 29-30, 2020**  
**St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa**  
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Do you remember that old TV cartoon in which the main character - I think it was a dog – had to make a decision about which action to take, and there were two beings hovering over his shoulders? The one on his right was a little angel in white, with a halo and flapping wings; over the left, was a little devil in a red suit with a pitch fork, and pointy tail. “Listen to me; this is the way of good” says the angel. “No listen to me; it’s so much easier my way” says the devil, or words to that effect. The dog is usually depicted with his head going back and forth between the two, trying to decide which path to take: the path of good or the path of evil.

In our First Reading, Jeremiah is experiencing something like this. He had already decided to walk on the side of the angels, having been “enticed” by God. But he was not enjoying the consequences. You can almost hear the little devil egging him on, saying, “Why should you have to put up with all of this derision? Just stop preaching and your life will be so much easier”. And the little devil wins out.

But Jeremiah’s better self knows the truth: “I say to myself, “I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.”” He could not ignore God’s plan for him no matter how much he tried. God is not pushy but he is persistent and oh so patient.

In this busy world, with so many distractions, demands, and worries - especially now - how do we attune ourselves to be able to even hear God’s voice? In the Second Reading, Paul gives us a clue as to how we can at least make ourselves receptive. “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

This reminds me of a description I read of modern-day prophets like Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Nelson Mandela and Ghandi. They were described as living their lives on the edge of the inside - they were just enough on the inside of the dominant culture or social system to know it with all its strengths and faults, but not at the centre where they would be too invested with much to lose. They hadn’t **conformed** themselves to the world but rather had been **transformed** so that they in turn could help transform others and, in many cases, speak truth to worldly powers.

Even if we are attuned and eager to learn God’s plan for us, how do we recognize it? Richard Rohr , the Franciscan priest who founded the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has said, on a number of occasions, that “God comes to you disguised as your life”. When you think about it, where else would he come to us?

So, it was a bit of a shock to me the other day when, in the midst of my life, folding laundry, I realized that in preparing this reflection I was definitely not practicing what I was supposed to be preaching, so to speak. I had set out a schedule in my mind to be finished writing this reflection by a certain day so that I would have time to revise and practice. I was getting a bit anxious because things weren’t coming together the way I wanted. I realized that I was being a bit like Peter in the Gospel when he argues with

Jesus about Jesus' death and resurrection. He says, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." Like Peter, I was thinking like a human, expecting the ideas to conform to my schedule, not listening for what God might want me to say, and on his schedule not mine. It took the mundane activity of everyday life to help me realize what I was doing and to relax and let things just be.

God could also be coming to you in that voice in your head that won't go away. You might think of this inner voice as the Holy Spirit, your conscience, maybe even your guardian angel. It's probably not telling you anything you didn't already know but might be trying to ignore, like Jeremiah did: "You should offer to help that person over there who looks lost." But you're in a bad mood and you don't feel like it. So, you don't. "You have a pile of loonies and toonies in your pocket; why not give them to that man asking you for spare change". But perhaps we tell ourselves that surely God doesn't expect me to help **every** person asking me for money, does he?" And so, we keep our excess treasure, and our eyes averted.

It's easy to justify to ourselves the decisions we make in order to make ourselves feel better or to stop feeling guilty. But by doing so, might we have deprived ourselves of what could have been the other part of God's suggestion. "If you help this person out, your mood will probably improve and you might even make a new friend." "I'm not asking you to help **every** panhandler today, just **this** one who I know really needs it." As Jesus points out to Peter in Matthew's Gospel, "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

When you put all the readings together, we can see that perhaps our lives are not really all about us. The readings challenge us to set aside our willfulness and our desires, or the ones the world tries very hard to convince us to focus on. Instead they remind us that our lives are about finding and carrying out what we're really here for.

And although Jesus said, "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it", what you might find is your **true** life, the one that is uniquely yours in God's divine plan.