



# Sunday Reflection

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 30 August 2020

# Pentecost 13

On this 13th Sunday after Pentecost, and the twelfth Sunday after Trinity, we are reminded that being a Christian is not always easy, but we serve a master who loves us so much that he was prepared to share our human nature, live among us and suffer and die for us. That love is what inspires us to follow Christ and to come together in worship today.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"But he turned and said to Peter,  
'Get behind me, Satan!'"** Matthew 16.23

### An Illustration to set the scene

In Rome it is possible to visit the Mamertine Prison, which many claim is where Peter was detained before his execution. The apostle is supposed to have been kept in an underground cell there. There was no door to this chamber, so prisoners were either lowered or simply thrown into it through a hole in the floor of the room above. This underground dungeon was dug into the rock and would have been a cold, damp, dark and deeply depressing place which, being close to the main Roman sewer, must have smelt horrendous. After his stay in this horrific dungeon, tradition has it that he was crucified upside down.

Whether his prison was here or not, few doubt that Peter was held captive somewhere and died for his faith. Despite all he

suffered, however, he was not a naturally brave man. The Bible famously describes him denying Christ repeatedly because he was afraid that he would be arrested like his master. In addition, church tradition has it that he fled Rome to avoid the persecution that was happening to Christians at the hands of Emperor Nero. It is claimed that he found the courage to turn back and face death when he saw a vision of Christ heading the opposite way into Rome. Today's reading offers us further evidence of Peter's struggle to grasp the connection between following Christ and suffering.



## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

In last Sunday's Gospel reading, we heard how Peter received high praise from Jesus because he recognised him to be the Messiah, the long-awaited deliverer. Jesus declared that Peter could only have received this revelation from God and that he would become the rock that the Church would be built upon.

Yet in a short space of time Peter went from being praised by Jesus to being rebuked and called Satan. Peter may have realised that Jesus was the Messiah, but he had misunderstood what kind of messiah he was. Like others of his time, he expected their deliverer to vanquish Israel's Roman oppressors, not be tried, tortured and die at their hands. Jesus' talk of a suffering messiah shocked and angered Peter and even provoked him to take Christ aside and reprimand him.

Jesus, however, rebuked him back. In his eyes, Peter was acting like Satan because he was tempting him to follow an easier path. Jesus knew that he had to suffer and die in order to bring salvation to the world. Christ also warned Peter and the other disciples that those who followed him would also suffer like him. However, he encouraged them that, despite the heavy cost, following him was worth it and they would be rewarded on his return for all they had gone through.

## **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

People are often encouraged to become Christians through promises of a better life, promises that faith brings peace, strength and healing. While all these things are true, if we leave the message there we are in danger of giving a false impression that being a Christian is always easy. This is misleading and creates false expectations.

Today's passage makes it very plain that, far from promising a problem-free life, there is a cost to following Jesus. Being a Christian may mean that we are mocked, misunderstood or even persecuted. Discipleship involves making difficult and often costly life choices. This may seem discouraging, but although living for Christ can be hard, it is also fulfilling. We can also be encouraged that Jesus promises to reward us for our sufferings on his return, and that he understands everything that we go through, because he too suffered. So we can talk to him about our struggles and be assured that he is right there beside us.

Whenever we are worried that we are not up to this challenge, we can look to Peter. He failed frequently and lacked courage often, yet he went on to be a great church leader, despite his weaknesses. God knows we are not naturally strong, and that we lack courage. What matters is our willingness to serve the Lord. For, as Peter's life shows, God will help us with the rest.

**“But he turned and said to Peter,  
'Get behind me, Satan!'"** Matthew 16.23

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**