

Our readings this weekend seem determined to bring to light for us a particular kind of pride...one of the most dangerous varieties...that of *hubris*. Its lethality lies in the fact that it can be very difficult to recognize because it can exist even in people who sincerely love God. The conviction that we know what's best in nearly every situation we encounter in this life is one that is - to an extent - a natural extension of our rational will. We look at all the facets of our life - our families, our jobs, our personal problems, our suffering, the risks and rewards of the future, and we form our judgments about what needs to happen - fair enough. We ask God for what we want, and often what we ask for is genuinely good. We ask for healing, reconciliation, success, protection, peace, and happiness; but with all this, there is a danger that can quietly enter into our prayer. We can begin by asking God to bless our plans (totally legitimate), but end by *expecting* God to *follow our plans*. We begin to link - in an inextricable way - what we want with what God should do. This is nothing less than hubris of the highest order - spiritual

pride. It is the presumption that our limited understanding is sufficient to judge the wisdom of God, and even to supersede it.

Saint Peter gives us a powerful example of this in today's Gospel. If you'll recall, last Sunday, Peter made one of the greatest acts of faith in the entire Gospel. He recognized Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter confessed the truth about who Jesus is. Yet only a few moments later - exactly eight verses down in the same Gospel - Peter hears Jesus explain that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised again - and Peter cannot accept this. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Peter believes that he understands what is good for Jesus better than Jesus Himself. Peter wants the Messiah, but he wants a Messiah without the Cross. He wants God's victory, but he cannot accept God's path to that victory. Peter loves Jesus, but his love is still mixed with the arrogance of thinking that his understanding is greater than God's plan.

If we're honest with ourselves when evaluating our own spiritual lives, we would likely have to admit that we operate much of the time

Peter did in our Gospel today. We can believe in the omnipotence and omniscience of God, and still try to tell Him how He should run our lives. We can pray for a particular outcome and become angry when God gives us another. We can become discouraged when a door closes, bitter when suffering comes, or impatient when God does not act according to our timetable. We can look at one painful circumstance and decide that God must have made a mistake. We can look at one unanswered prayer and conclude that God is not listening. We can look at one difficult person, one disappointment, one illness, one financial problem, one family crisis, or one uncertain future and assume that we know what God needs to do to make everything right. But we see only a small piece of the story. God sees the whole thing. We see the present moment. God sees eternity. We see the impact on us of a certain thing in the moment...God sees what He may bring from it tomorrow. Our vision is limited, but God's wisdom is perfect.

This is why the Gospel Acclamation is so appropriate today. In it, we ask God to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that the eyes

of our hearts may be enlightened. We need God to enlighten us because our natural vision is not enough, despite what we may delude ourselves into thinking. How often are we convinced that we understand the totality of what is happening when we actually understand very little. We are especially vulnerable to this when circumstances require from us some sacrifice or the endurance of pain. We then resort to judging God's goodness according to whether or not He gives us what we want in the moment. We judge His faithfulness according to whether He answers our prayers in the way we expect. We have to see how insane such a disposition really is! How bold of us - on the basis of nothing concrete - to effectively say to God, "I know better". We're like the petulant child who throws a tantrum in the store because they're not getting what they want...what they see fit...what they think is best, precisely when they demand it. We all know what goes through our heads when we see that kind of behavior in public. How then, might God see us when we treat Him the same way? We must remember who it is we call "our Father"...God remains good even when we don't understand what He is

doing. It is our duty to trust His wisdom, even and especially when His plan is different from ours.

Saint Paul tells us in our Second Reading that “...*we must be transformed by the renewal of our minds so that we may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*” This transformation doesn’t happen automatically. We are surrounded by a world that constantly tells us to trust ourselves, follow our instincts, determine our own truth, and make our own path; but God’s instructions to us are very different. We are not the center of reality. We did not create ourselves. We did not create the world around us. We do not know the future. We do not possess perfect knowledge. We are creatures, and God is the Creator. True freedom does not mean getting God to conform to our will. True freedom means allowing our will to become conformed to His.

This surrender has to reach into the ordinary details of our lives. It is easy to say that we trust God with eternity while refusing to trust Him with Tuesday afternoon. We may trust Him with salvation, but still try to

control every conversation, every relationship, every decision, every inconvenience, and every unexpected change in our daily lives. We need to learn to bring even these things to God in prayer. Before making a decision, pray. Before reacting in anger, pray. When someone disappoints you, pray. When a plan falls apart, pray. When you receive something you did not expect, pray. When you are tempted to force an outcome, pray. When you do not understand what God is permitting, pray. Prayer is how we learn to surrender. It remains a fact of human nature that we do not truly trust people we do not know. Trust grows through relationship. The same is true in our relationship with God. If prayer is a rare feature of our lives, then our knowledge of God will remain shallow, and our trust will remain weak. But when we spend time with God, when we speak honestly to Him, when we listen to His Word, when we come before Him in the Blessed Sacrament, and bring Him all our fears and desires, then we begin to know Him more deeply. And as we come to know Him, we begin to trust Him. We begin to discover that

surrender is not giving ourselves over to a stranger. We are placing ourselves into the hands of a Father who loves us.

Jeremiah gives us yet another side of this struggle in our First Reading. He tells us how he has suffered because he has been faithful to God. He is discouraged and feels the weight of his mission in a very real way; and yet the Word of God has become something within him that he cannot abandon. Jeremiah shows us that trusting God doesn't mean that we never struggle. It does not mean that every circumstance will immediately make sense. It means that even in our struggle, we continue to turn toward God rather than away from Him. Our Responsorial Psalm expresses the same movement. The soul thirsts for God because God has become more important than everything else. When our desire for God becomes stronger than our desire to control our circumstances, our hearts begin to change.

St. Peter should be for us a figure of tremendous hope. His rebuke of Jesus - however foolish - was not the end of his story...it wasn't what ultimately defined him. In fact, as we all know, Peter would fail again.

He would deny Jesus outright during His Passion; and still, Jesus did not abandon him. Peter eventually learned the lesson that he was so blind to in our Gospel today; he learned that following Christ means following Him even when the road leads through suffering. He learned that discipleship means taking up the cross rather than demanding that God remove every cross. He learned that his own understanding could not save him, but Christ could. The same Peter who once tried to correct Jesus would eventually give his whole life for Jesus.

All of this should lend peace to those of us who recognize ourselves in Peter. We may have spent years trying to control things that belong to God. We may have become angry with God because He did not answer our prayers according to our wishes. We may have resisted circumstances that God was permitting for reasons we could not see. We may have allowed anger and a lack of understanding to harden our hearts to things God asks of us through His Church, like the particulars concerning how Mass is to be celebrated, or the ways in which we are to render praise to Him. We may have trusted our own judgment more than

we trusted His providence. But our failures do not have to be the end of our story. Christ patiently teaches His disciples. He corrected Peter, formed Peter, forgave Peter, and eventually entrusted Peter with great responsibility in the Church...a responsibility that He bids us submit to, even now, more than 2,000 years later.

The Cross stands at the center of today's Gospel because it stands at the center of Christianity. Peter wanted Jesus to avoid the Cross because Peter could not see what God would accomplish through it. There is a very important lesson in this: God does not ask us to understand everything - He asks us to follow Him. He asks us to trust Him. He asks us to surrender our own narrow vision and allow Him to lead us.

The prayer we need, then, is not only for God to change our circumstances...we need to pray for God to change *us*. We need Him to enlighten the eyes of our hearts. We need Him to renew our minds. We need Him to teach us to desire His will more than our own. And we need the humility to remember, every day and in every circumstance, that we

are not God. We do not know better than God. We do not see what God sees. We do not understand what God understands. But we can know Him, and we can trust Him. Through prayer, through the sacraments, through His Word, and through faithful obedience, we can learn to place our lives more completely in His hands. That is the humility that frees us. That is the faith that sustained Peter. And that is the faith by which Christ teaches us to follow Him all the way to the Cross and, with Him, to the Resurrection. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!