

**22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 31, 2008**

**J.A. Loftus, S.J.**

**Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27**

**In last Sunday's gospel, we heard Peter articulate his stunning insight about who Jesus of Nazareth really was. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and Son of the living God. Peter was praised for listening to God's voice, renamed the rock, given the keys to the Kingdom, and must have felt generally wonderful about himself.**

**Immediately afterwards, we have today's gospel. Here Peter is called Satan by Jesus, called an obstacle, a "scandal," and told his thinking about God has got to radically change. This is all a rather quick turn-around, no? Matthew is intent on making a very important point—about Peter, and about all of us.**

**Listening to God's voice requires, absolutely requires, a different way of thinking: about ourselves, about the world, about God. Thinking the way normal human beings do, as Jesus says, will simply not do. God's plans demand something different. Just ask Jeremiah who feels so duped and finds himself an object of laughter, derided and reproached all day long. Jeremiah**

**says to himself: I will just stop talking about God; I will no longer even mention his name. But God becomes like a fire in his chest that he cannot hold in any longer.**

**Just ask Paul who writes to the Roman community that they had better be prepared to offer even their bodies in sacrifice. (And, of course, so many Roman martyrs did just that.) St. Paul warns them not to waste too much time conforming to this age, but to allow themselves to be transformed by the renewal of their minds. Be prepared, in other words, to change your way of thinking quickly and radically. Your thinking about yourself and about God.**

**Following Jesus, the Christ and Son of God, will lead Peter, James, John and all the others, and each of us, into strange places where crosses will have to be leaned into not run from, and where death will have to be faced squarely, if not happily, in order to rise again. Most of the following of Jesus will make no sense whatsoever to the thinking of this age, or any age.**

**And the Promise is of life beyond our imagining, a fullness and abundance unfathomed. And Jesus asks Peter and us: for what would you trade *that* life? Nothing is worth it.**

**Robert Bolt, in his marvelous play *A Man for All Seasons*, has Thomas More refer to this gospel at his trial. The man who has just perjured himself,**

**Master Rich, is seen wearing a chain of office around his neck, a chain of office for Wales; it is his reward for lying. Thomas More says to him: “Richard, it does not profit a man to lose his soul for the whole world, but for Wales?”**

**Later in prison, Thomas More also says: “Our natural path lies in escaping.” But, my brothers and sisters, no one can really escape the call of God. But everyone still seems to try to escape: Jeremiah, St. Paul, Peter. And us? What of us? I leave you with the question: where is your Wales?**