

When Jesus says to Peter: ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he’s not saying that Peter is the devil, but he *is* getting a bit impatient with him. Of course, Jesus got impatient – because he was fully – *fully* – human. If he never got impatient, he wouldn’t be fully human, because impatience isn’t necessarily a sin. If he never got angry (which he certainly did) he wouldn’t be fully human, because anger is sometimes righteous. If he never laughed or cried or teased or was closer to some people than others, he wouldn’t be fully human. But he was. It may make some people a bit uncomfortable to think about this – but if you don’t, you’re left with a shining, shimmering, holy and pure other-worldly man. Hardly a human being at all.

So, in today’s gospel, Jesus snaps at Peter. He snaps in dramatic, biblical early first century Aramaic – which is what he spoke – but it actually means: ‘For heaven’s sake, don’t distract me! Don’t you know I’ve got the world to save? He knew what was coming and the suffering he must undergo, and he didn’t want his will and his mind taken off that task. Poor old Peter got the wrong end of the stick, as usual – even so, Jesus chose him to lead what was to become the universal church. Getting the *right* end of the stick was never a qualification for discipleship.

In the same reading, Jesus says: ‘If anyone wants to be my follower, let him take up his cross and follow me.’ We have to note that he didn’t say: Go out and *find* a cross – he meant the cross that was already there. All of us have crosses to carry – we don’t have to look for them, there’re right there. We tend to think of our crosses as illness – mental or physical – old age, disease, trouble with others, being in financial trouble, and so on. But all these things have an *external* cause, outside of us, that we have no control over – they have no malicious intent towards us, it’s nothing personal. It’s just what life in this world can be like.

Our biggest cross is inside, within us. All our psychological kinks, our failure to love, our faults and weaknesses, all those desires that we're most ashamed of, the dark thoughts we can't share even with those closest to us, our fears and anxieties, our compulsions. All *that*, within us, is our true cross. It's that we have to pick up if we are to follow the Lord. We accept it, take responsibility for it, and put it on our shoulders. And we walk through life, heads held high, with as much dignity as possible. This is what losing our life means: and we are walking with our cross towards the bright horizon of eternal life.