

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

One of the things that interests me as I read the stories from Scripture has to do with the interpersonal dynamics that are involved.

How are the people relating to one another, and why do they do so in one way and not in another?

Even though the answer often involves some speculation on my part—the scriptural record often does not provide enough detail to arrive at a definitive answer—I find today's Gospel passage to be quite interesting in that regard.

One question I bring is this: What possessed Peter to come to the conclusion that he needed to set Jesus straight as to his future as the messiah? Where was he coming from?

My initial thought is that he had to be coming from some sense of the tradition that he had been raised up in. As a fisherman from Galilee we have to assume, I think, that his ideas were the result of his upbringing in a predominantly Jewish environment. He wasn't schooled in another way of looking at things.

So, something that Jesus says does not fit the picture of how Peter has come to believe God will act. His views of the Messiah are different than Jesus' views, and, as far as he can tell, they are the ones that are commonly held.

When Jesus starts talking about suffering and dying, Peter campaigns for the conventional image of the Messiah as the one who overcomes

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the oppressor and restores the glory Israel knew in the time of king David.

He's not alone. Jesus' glance at the other disciples is his way of acknowledging that what Peter is saying is what the others are thinking.

But Jesus is accessing the tradition, too. His reflection on his mission has led him to the book of Isaiah rather than the record of David's exploits. Today's first reading provided him with a sort of blueprint of how things would unfold and what the final result would be. He has embraced that scenario. It fits better with how things seem to be unfolding.

Any other way of looking at it ends up being a distraction and a temptation for him to shirk his mission.

This is a good example of the kind of ongoing discernment we are called to exercise as we live out our faith.

No doubt we have favorite passages of scripture, favorite elements of our tradition that we use to forge an image of what it's all about. And that's what we go with.

None of us has such a grasp on the totality of our Scriptures and 2000 year tradition, though, to be able to say that we know, without a doubt, what God is up to, how he's going to bring his plan to completion.

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And so we have to be careful, and most of all, humble, so that we stay tuned and not solidify one way of looking at it all which keeps us from new perspectives.

In the Jesuit magazine *America* there's an article this week about an initiative to bring together nuns and "nones." The "nones" are millennials who describe themselves as having no single religious practice. They're not church-goers. They are not often found in the same room with sisters who have spent a lifetime involved in the Church and the Church's ministry.

But by all accounts the encounter was exciting and surprising. One sister commented, "I believe we are more alike than we are different." There is a growing level of interest in seeing the conversation continue.

For their part the sisters have been impressed by the depth of the spiritual longing the millennials bring with them. They are honestly looking for something to counteract the loneliness that comes with the digital era and the stress of living in such a fast-paced society.

The millennials, particularly those involved in social activism, have been impressed by how the sisters manage to keep engaged over the long haul. They also like the simplicity and community-based decision-making that communities of sisters have adopted. That seems like a better model for them than the top-down

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approach.

Both groups recognize that something new is going on, and they try to attune themselves to it.

Jesus was fully aware that the “something new” that God was inaugurating through him would not be just a return to the glory days of king David. That would never do.

He took to heart the words of Isaiah, “Behold, I am making things new; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

We recognize a lot that we have come to know seems to be falling by the wayside. But we, above all others, should be people who have developed a propensity to look for that new thing that God is doing in our midst.

That’s also our tradition. When that means encountering others who do not share our heritage or mindset, we have no need to shy away or keep our distance. A mutual encounter can be mutually enriching, even if we don’t arrive at the same preliminary conclusion.

We can leave the rest to God

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### 1. Setup

Interested in the interpersonal dynamics of the stories in Scripture

How are the people relating to one another, and why do they do so in one way and not in another?

Today's Gospel an interesting example of that.

My question: What possessed Peter to arrive at the conclusion that he needed to take Jesus aside and set him straight regarding the role of the Messiah?

### 2. Preliminary considerations:

He had to be coming from some sense of the tradition he had grown up with; not likely that his ideas came from somewhere else.

Something Jesus says does not fit the picture that Peter operated from. His perception of the Messiah is different than that of Jesus. What's more, he believes his are the right ones—  
"everybody knows this."

When Jesus starts talking about suffering and dying, Peter advocates for the conventional image of the Messiah, the one who overcomes the oppressor and restores Israel to its former glory:  
"Come on, son of David!"

3. Jesus is also accessing the tradition

His reflection on his mission has led him to Isaiah (cf. first reading).

That's the passage that resonated with what he's experiencing, anticipating. He has embraced this scenario.

Other perspectives become a distraction and a temptation to abdicate his mission.

4. Actually, this is something we all have to work through in our ongoing discernment of God's call

We have favorite passages of scripture, favorite elements of the tradition that we use to make our way forward.

But we also leave some elements alone. We can't or won't work them in, for whatever reason.

None of us has a perfect grasp of Scripture and the tradition. We all are selective to some extent.

None of us know how God is going to bring the whole thing to completion.

We have to be careful, humble, and we have to stay tuned if we aren't going to end up blind to what God is actually doing.

5. Especially important as we accommodate a new generation coming of age. They will bring a perspective that makes sense to them.

Article in *America*: Bringing together the nuns

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and the “nones,” millennials who describe themselves as having no single religious practice. They are not church-goers. They don’t subscribe to any organized religion. They’re not often found in the same room with sisters.

The conversation was enlightening, energizing for all. Everyone was interesting in seeing the conversation continue. One sister said, “I believe we are more alike than we are different.”

The sisters: impressed by the depth of spiritual longing the millennials bring with them. They are honestly looking for something to counteract the loneliness of the digital age.

The millennials: Impressed by the perseverance, especially when it comes to social justice issues. They have stayed engaged over the long haul.

Also impressed by the sisters’ simplicity and community-based decision making. More horizontal than vertical hierarchy.

6. Both groups: “something new is going on.” Trying to attune themselves to it.

Jesus: fully aware that the “something new” would not be just the return to the glory days of king David

He took to heart Isaiah’s words: “Behold, I am making things new; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

7. That’s also our tradition: looking forward in

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hope. No need to fear the encounter with the other. A mutual encounter can be mutually enriching, even if we don't arrive at the same conclusion.

We'll always be on the way. The rest belongs to God.