

Today's readings tell us that following the way of Jesus Christ comes at a price. The early Christians were known as followers of 'the Way'. Strange as it may seem, I think it can be a very good thing when life becomes more difficult, because sometimes it is only when you feel a bit of persecution that you begin to think about what you believe in and why you believe it. That is very healthy.

In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah is having a bad day. He is complaining about how difficult it is for him to be God's spokesman and how much persecution it has brought him. He has had enough and he wants to give up; but God continually encourages him to keep going, to speak about him and it is as Jeremiah said, like a burning fire within which is irresistible.

We may sometimes feel a bit like Jeremiah; and I always find it quite consoling to remember that many of the great figures in the Bible also wanted to give up at times! For instance, the prophet Elijah, after working an extraordinary miracle, then has to run for his life as the queen wants to kill him. He sits down in the desert and says, 'Lord I've had enough. Take my life. I wish I was dead.'

When Peter objected to the fact that Jesus was going to be arrested and killed, Jesus spoke harshly to him; but the reason Jesus was so harsh with him was because Peter wanted what seemed easier. Our world will usually suggest what seems easier, but it is not always the right thing to do or a good thing to do. The Lord will take us in ways that we would sometimes rather not follow. So why bother to follow them? The reason is that the way of Jesus Christ is the way that leads to life. It can be hard, yes, but it is also worthwhile. It is the pearl of great price, for which it is worth giving up everything.

The world around can offer us many attractive things and some of them very nice indeed, but it cannot offer us a life after this one. Only God can offer that. 'What then will a person gain if he wins the whole world, but ruins his life?' And so Jesus tells us not to be afraid of it, not to be afraid of being different, or following a way that is not always acceptable.

But how can we follow this way if it is so difficult? The answer is, by relying on the Lord himself. That's where we get our strength from. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, that's why he gave himself to us in the Eucharist.

I have always found that it is the people who really live their faith who are least disturbed by things going on in the world. They have an inner strength that they get from their relationship with God, and that is there for all of us if we want it. I'm sure many of you experience this already. The Lord gives us everything we need, everything. All we have to do is reach out our hand and accept it.