

Duped Again...and Again and Again

Intro. Charlie Brown knew what Jeremiah was going through. Every time Lucy held the football for Charlie Brown to kick and promised not to move it, he had hope that she would not play him for a sucker. But Lucy did and every time Charlie Brown said he would never trust her again. At first Jeremiah was honored to be called by God to be a prophet. When he proclaimed God's warnings to the Israelites to repent instead of praise, he was cursed, betrayed by his friends and thrown in prison. He felt God had "duped," sweet-talked him into a thankless job. He thought about quitting because it was too hard. Peter didn't want to hear about the difficult part either.

I. He was the hero of last week's gospel because he was inspired by God to recognize the Lord as the

Messiah. This week he is just another confused disciple again. The Lord's rebuke seems harsh. After all he chose Simon Peter and then gave him a leadership position and authority. But Peter's first exercise of leadership was to tell the Lord no way was he going to suffer and die. I don't think the authority quickly went to his head; he was misled by his own idea of what the Messiah was and so became an obstacle to the mission. Peter had to unlearn the mistaken idea that the Messiah was a leader like those in religious and civil society. The Lord was not going to use his authority and power to crush his opponents. Peter had to accept suffering was part of being a disciple of the Lord as it is in life. Peter and the other disciples would struggle with this new idea of the Messiah who suffered, died and rose, but they would eventually accept it and do great things.

From one viewpoint, it seems God chooses strange people as leaders like Jeremiah and Peter. They complained and had their moments of doubt. We celebrated the patron of our diocese Friday. St. Augustine was a wild man in younger days. Read *Confessions*, his book about how he overcame his reluctance to God's mission and became one of the greatest theologians of our church. And of course we can fill in our *own* names in the list of God's strange choices. We have our shining moments and then get distracted by our own ideas of how to follow the Lord without a share of suffering in our lives.

Concl. The sign of the cross that we make in prayer is a reminder of the struggle and sacrifice the Lord made for us and our participation in the same mission. It is the reason we have the cross in our

churches and our homes. As often as Peter and the others found the Lord and then lost him, so do we. Yet God still calls us to be leaders in our families, our communities and our world and to choose our leaders wisely. Leaders who know they have their weaknesses and are in need of healing themselves can, with the grace of God, encourage us in our struggle for faith, justice and healing. The world can seem to be filled with Lucy characters who like to dupe us, but I believe there are more Charlie Brown-like people in the world who hope and trust in the Lord and the goodness of people. Both are marks of good leaders.

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