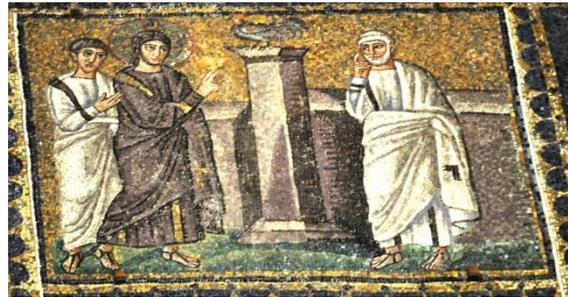


Lent Meditation 12 (Holy Week)

Mk.14,27-31

“ ‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’ Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’



‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘today – yes, tonight – before the cock crows you yourself will disown me three times.’ But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.”

The problem is not, G K Chesterton once remarked commenting on the state of Christianity, that it has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and left untried.

The disciples, on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion, are soon to realise the difficulty of following the Lord, of carrying out his teachings and obeying his word – in other words, of being Christians. Indeed, they will fail, even before things get going. All of them – non-starters. *‘You will all fall away, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”’*

With a view like this, what could the disciples do in response but protest? If Jesus is right and they all fall away when the going gets tough, as they know it will, then all will come to an end. Of all that they went through together, of all the teaching they received and the bond they forged and of the future they were promised, nothing would remain but memories and the sour taste of defeat and lost hopes. “If we fall away, would we not just be like the seed in the master’s parable, the one that fell on rocky places, people who don’t last when *‘persecution comes because of the word’*?” And so they protest. What else could they do? What else could they envisage that would avoid the catastrophe of failure?

As it turned out, they *were* defeated, they *did fail!* And with them many who likewise make the experience of being defeated on the way of following Christ by their own sinfulness and weakness.

But was it the end? It was the end only in as far as it made for a new beginning.

But it was an end that had to be.

Quite possibly the disciples didn't hear the words of utter grace that Jesus spoke, or if they did, they didn't make enough of them (as is often the case still today!): *'But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'* Do we hear what Jesus is saying? He means to tell this bunch that will not hold on to him that he will hold on to them! The point is *grace*: Jesus holds on to us even when we don't hold on to him! Through his death and resurrection Jesus means to make an end of their (and our!) bondage to sin and fear (anything that gives them over to death and separates them from God) and to be for them and in them through the Spirit the presence of God and of His rule.

Praise be to God for his grace. *"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever."* (Ps.118,1)