

- He was wrong, clearly so. The more I thought about it, the more I knew I was right. And the angrier I got.
  - A classmate and I had a heated discussion and now, just a couple of hours afterward, I was stewing over it, rehashing it.
  - I had to interrupt my review to go, somewhat ironically, to spiritual direction but couldn't get it out of my mind.
  - I fully expected Father Radloff, my spiritual director, would confirm that I was right. After telling the story, I sat back on the couch and caught my breath.
  - Rather than nod his head in full agreement as I expected, he paused. Finally, he said, "Rob. Do something for me." He paused for another long moment. "Take a step back; look at this from a different angle. Try to look at this situation as God sees it. And, more importantly, I want you to look at that person and see him as God does."
  - Wow!! In an instant, I was knocked off my righteously indignant high horse, the wind taken out of my sails.
  - I was breathless (which is rare), speechless (which is even rarer). For the first time, I thought of the other guy's perspective and, more importantly, of God's perspective.
    - I may have been right about the point of our argument but that there was so much more in this encounter.
    - I recognized, more remembered, that the other guy was struggling with a number of issues and was far from home, probably for the first time.
    - I had squandered a particular opportunity God had provided only to me to do something beautiful, to swallow my pride and to help a brother in need. Right as I may have been, I completely missed the boat.
- *Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.*
  - Remember last week? Peter took us out on a high note. In a display of great faith, strong trust and profound love, Peter recognizes who Jesus truly is: "*You are the Christ. The Son of the Living God.*" And Jesus lets Peter know that this wisdom comes from the very mouth of God and promises to build His church on the rock of Peter's faith.
  - And now, Peter seeks to continue that streak, to demonstrate further his love his love for Jesus
    - Peter doesn't take Jesus aside in the polite way we should step out of the room to take a phone call.
    - No, the original word is *proslabemos* which literally translates to "take possession of" and carries with the sense of grabbing hold and pulling forcibly.
    - In other words, Peter gets up in Jesus' face as if, by force he prevent the Jesus he loves from having to suffer.
    - Peter loves Jesus, recognizing all God has promised and now Jesus is predicting it away. God forbid anything like that should happen.
    - It's the stronger and far more forceful version of my mother's "Oh honey, don't even talk like that."

- Jesus does not shrink from the passion of Peter or the vehemence of Peter’s response to his prediction.
  - Instead, Jesus responds with a passion and vehemence all his own: *Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.*
  - Jesus moves Peter just as vehemently out of the way and continues toward Jerusalem knowing He will suffer and die.
  - It’s not that Jesus wants to suffer or die, and it’s not that he seeks it out. But Jesus will not forsake the cross simply to avoid the suffering and the shame.
  - Jesus is willing to take up the cross out of love for Peter, out of love for us, for each one of us.
  
- And **that’s** the way God thinks.
  - **That’s** God’s will, what Saint Paul tells us in our letter to the Romans, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
  - Let me make it clear, God’s will is not that we suffer. Suffering is neither good nor pleasing nor perfect and God is not some cosmic sadist who inflicts that pain simply to watch us suffer.
  - No, as John tells us in his Gospel: God is love and God’s will for us is to give us that love, for us to receive that love, to revel in that love. **This** is what is good and pleasing and perfect: that’s God’s love is not stopped by suffering, is not limited by our sinfulness nor dependent on our merits.
  
- And even as God so loves us, He calls us to think and to will like He does, indeed to love as He does.
  - As Jesus does with Peter, so to with each one of us, we are called to think as God does.
  - To think like God, to act like Jesus:
    - we must be willing to trust in God even when it seems we have been abandoned,
    - we must be willing to sacrifice our own comfort and security to forge ahead even when the going is tough
    - AND we must be willing to submit our will to God’s, even when we know it only imperfectly or find it contrary to our own, even when we know, as I did, we are right.
    - We must be willing to see situations from God’s perspective, even as he challenges us to live within our own.
  - In other words, as Jesus tells us, we must be willing to take our cross, daily, even minute by minute. We must deny our very selves and follow after Jesus.
  - As Saint John the Baptist said, *“He must increase and I must decrease.”*
  
- And what do we get for such a difficult sacrifice? How are we rewarded?
  - *You duped me Lord and I let myself be duped... All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me... violence and outrage is my message; the word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day.*
  - I did not want to do this Lord. I speak as you ask, because you asked, and they mock me. And we know that Jeremiah ain’t seen “nothin” yet because arrest, imprisonment, and public disgrace and then exile from his own country would follow.

- When we take up the cross, we will suffer. When we follow Christ, we will suffer. When we stand up for what we believe, we will suffer.
- And we realize, both from the example of Peter and from our second reading from Saint Paul that our acceptance of suffering does not come over night.
  - Peter's love for the Lord is imperfect, deficient. He proclaims Jesus as God one minute and misses the point on the next. He promises to protect Jesus and then he denies Jesus when Jesus needs him most. And even after the Resurrection, Peter starts and stops and stumbles. But love he does and sacrifice he does and suffer he does.
  - And this evolution that we see in Peter is the point of our second reading which speaks about transformation, renewal, and discernment, about not conforming ourselves to this age or to human standards but to the very mind and heart of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
- And we do not suffer alone, nor do we suffer in vain.
  - The same Christ who asks us to take up our cross comes this [afternoon] morning to feed us and nourish us and give us strength. God is always with us to help us shoulder the burden.
  - And the burden is not merely to make us strong in the end. God will bring goodness out of that suffering in ways we cannot even imagine.
  - This is true for us as individuals and for us as a community. God is calling us beyond ourselves, to see and to act from His perspective, to draw closer to Him and help others as well.
- And if we do this, if we offer everything even our suffering, then the second coming of Christ, then in glory, will be nothing to fear. Jesus refers to it in our gospel today: *For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct.* We can stand with open arms and listen for the ultimate reward: *Well done, good and faithful servant. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*