

September 3, 2017 The Path of Escape Homily: In his splendid biography of the celebrated filmmaker, comic and actor Woody Allen, the author, Eric Lax, points to one of the earliest influences in young Mr. Allen's life, the legendary entertainer, Bob Hope. As a boy, he and his mother saw many of Mr. Hope's films in which the actor often played the part of a scoundrel who usually found himself in a jam. His natural impulse was to run away. But he was unsuccessful. He had little choice but to be courageous in the most trying of circumstances. Mr. Allen referred to his elder, Bob Hope, as "A coward's coward". In many of Allen's films, he imitates Bob Hope's characters timid nature to perfection.

The gospel (Mt. 16:21-28) marks a significant turning point in the life of Christ. Jesus reveals that it is God's will that He suffer greatly at the hands of the religious establishment of his day (Mt.16:21). His words must have been received with shock and dismay. The first of the apostles, Peter, hears only the words of defeat and suffering and will have none of it. He reacts violently. By scolding his Master (Mt.16:22), he surrenders to the human disdain of suffering. Unwittingly, he has made himself an obstacle (stumbling block) to Jesus in carrying out God's will. For the moment, Peter, like Satan in the wilderness, has made himself the Lord's adversary. The disciples must embrace the Divine will and follow the path of Jesus. Sadly, we recall that virtually all of them deserted him on the day of his crucifixion.

If we wish to understand and appreciate Our Lord's words, let us turn to the words of the erstwhile pope, Benedict XVI. "If, to save us, the Son of God has to suffer and die on the cross, it was certainly not by a cruel design of the heavenly Father. The reason is the gravity of the illness, which He came to heal us. It was such a serious, mortal disease that it required His blood."

In his masterful screenplay for the film based on the life of the English martyr, Sir Thomas Moore, Robert Bolt, the author, has Thomas Moore say in the face of a likely brutal death, the following candid words about human frailty: "Our natural path lies in escaping".

If we are really living in accordance with the Spirit of the Lord, we will likely attract the hatred of the world. One need only consider the enormous sufferings of Christians in Egypt, Sudan, China and the more subtle persecutions of Christians in the once Christian western world. What is our reaction to the words of Jesus about what would happen to him? We are accustomed to the cross of Christ. It is found everywhere... in our churches, cemeteries and homes. How many young people have a tattoo of the cross as a mark on their body? But what does it mean? In the recent past, it clearly called to mind, at the very least, to bear all our trials with courage and faith.

Do we wish to embrace a faith that makes few demands of us and minimizes the role of pain and suffering in Christian discipleship? If such is the case, then, like Peter we are the adversaries of Jesus and enemies of the cross!

Amen!