

“A week [they say] is a long time in politics.” I believe it was Harold Wilson who came up with that saying. I wonder what he’d have made of the speed with which changes in public affairs happen nowadays. Famously, or notoriously, we’re now on our seventh Prime Minister in barely more than a decade; in the same period we’ve had ten Home secretaries, ten Foreign Secretaries, and nine Chancellors of the Exchequer. The days when a Thatcher or a Blair could see out ten years or more in the top job, or when people like Gordon Brown or George Osborne seemed permanent fixtures at No. 11, appear to be behind us.

Never mind a week, even a day can sometimes be a long time in contemporary affairs. What’s a racing certainty today can be a total non-starter the next. And whatever else it may prove, it certainly shows how quickly people can change. Human nature is a very fickle thing – inconstant, shifting with the wind.

A week can indeed be a long time, whether in politics or other matters. A week ago today we heard Saint Peter make his great profession of faith: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God – drawing from Jesus the promise that Peter would be the foundation, the Rock, on which the Church would be built, and that he’d be entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

But today – what a contrast! Just a few lines further on in the Gospel we hear Peter remonstrating with Jesus and refusing to believe that his prediction of the Passion was true. And Jesus’s response is extreme and uncompromising: “Get behind me, Satan!” The very person that Jesus had just made the basis of his Church for all eternity, was also the only person that he ever addressed as if he were the devil himself.

How fickle we humans are! Like Peter, we go from one extreme to the

other: one minute brimming with faith, the next beset by doubt. One minute we're quite contented and the next full of disquiet. It's been said that there's one thing even God cannot do – and that's to keep everybody happy!

The way of the true disciple of Christ runs clean contrary to what most people expect and look for in life. If you want honour or riches then I advise you to go and find someone else to follow because following Christ is absolutely no guarantee of these things. Anyone who's serious in their Christian faith is much more likely to find themselves a laughing-stock of the fickle crowd – just like Jeremiah in our first reading.

In spite of Peter's great profession of faith, he so little understood what Jesus was about that he imagined it was a way of success and happiness, not a path which could possibly be beset by suffering and failure, let alone the death of the cross. How could that conceivably be the way of the Messiah, the glorious Anointed One of God? All his thinking was completely dominated by short-term, worldly assessments of what constitutes glory. And hence the devastating rebuke he receives from Jesus: "You think as men think, not as God thinks."

One of the hardest things for any of us to accept is that the Christian life is the way of renunciation, the way of sacrifice, and can often lead to real suffering and loss. The true values of our faith are quite contrary to the transient values of this world which are so focussed on materialism and status.

By contrast, the Christian way gives highest place to such values as truth, integrity, selflessness, love, humility, mercy, chastity and service. St Paul, as usual, puts it very aptly: Do not model yourselves,

he says, on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. When we first commit to living as a Christian, or seek to renew that commitment if it's perhaps become somewhat lukewarm, that means acquiring a new mind – a new way of looking at the world. Seeing things with the eyes of Christ himself. Thinking as God thinks, not as men think. Opening ourselves to that most radical and challenging of callings, the call to become the people we truly are and were always intended to be in God's designs.

Once we set that calling at the heart of our lives, we shouldn't be surprised if we discover a direction, a meaning and a purpose which we didn't know before. It won't protect us from tragedy and hardship, but that tragedy and hardship will itself be transformed, because in uniting our self-offering with that of Jesus, we'll be rising to our full potential as God's children, and finding our true selves. That was a lesson which St Peter learned the hard way, but which was to form the basis for his unique rôle in God's purposes.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” The world has plenty of specious and seductive arguments against those words of Jesus, plenty of temptations to be fickle; but for those who are willing to dare to follow the way of Christ – to think as God thinks, and not as mankind thinks – that deepest of human aspirations is within their grasp: to become the men or women that, in the divine dispensation, they always had the potential to be: setting behind them their histories of failure or timidity or half-heartedness and being transformed into that image which they may have dimly aspired to but had never before truly achieved.