

## 22nd Sunday Ordinary Time 2023

Once again we have a story in the Sunday gospel about Peter and Jesus. Today Peter fails to understand the ways of God. God's love is so immense that he sent His Son for our salvation, something achieved by his life, death and resurrection. Peter says that Jesus cannot be the Messiah this way. Jesus then corrects Peter by telling him that God's way is different than what we expect it will be.

In the second reading today St. Paul teaches what this means. We must offer our lives as a living sacrifice, discerning what is the will of God, and do what is good and pleasing and perfect.

It was a bitterly cold Christmas eve in Korea in 1952. A pregnant young mother, Bak Yoon, hobbled through the snow toward the home of a missionary friend where she knew she could find help. Tears of sorrow froze on her face as she mourned her husband. He had recently been killed in the Korean War, and she had no one else to turn to. A short way down the road from her missionary friend's house was a deep gully spanned by a bridge. As Bak Yoon stumbled forward, birth pains suddenly overcame her. She fell, realizing that she could go no further, and crawled under the end of the bridge. There, alone, under the bridge, her baby boy was born. Bak Yoon had nothing with her except her heavy, padded clothes. One by one she removed all pieces of her clothing and wrapped them around her tiny son, still connected to her body by his umbilical cord. Then feeling exhausted she lay back in the snow beside her baby.

The next morning Miss Watson, long-time missionary, drove across the bridge in her car to take a Christmas basket of food to a needy Korean family. On her way back, as she got near the bridge, the car sputtered and died – out of gasoline. She got out of the car and started across the bridge. Through crunching snow under her feet she heard another sound – a baby's faint cry. She stopped, unbelieving, and heard the cry again. "It's coming from beneath this bridge!" She crawled under the bridge to investigate and there she found a tiny, bundled baby, warm but hungry, and young Bak Yoon frozen in death. With a knife from her tool box she cut the cord and took the baby home with her.

After caring first for the child, she, along with some helpers, brought Bak Yoon's body back to near where she lived and buried her there. She named the baby Soo Park, and adopted him. He was strong and healthy and so grew up among many other orphan children that Miss Watson cared for. But to her, Soo Park was special. She often told him,

“Your mother had great love for you, Soo Park,” and about how she had proved that love. He never got tired of hearing of his beautiful mother. On Christmas day, his 12th birthday, snow was falling. After the children had helped Soo Park celebrate his birthday, he came and sat beside Miss Watson. “Mother Watson, do you think God made your car run out of gasoline the day you found me?” he asked. “Perhaps He did,” she answered. “If that car hadn’t stopped, I would not have found you. But I am so glad it stopped. I love you and am very proud of you, Soo Park.” She put her arms around him. He rested his head against her.

“ Mother Watson, will you please take me out to my mother’s grave? I want to pray there. I want to thank her for my life.” “Yes, but put on your heavy coat. It’s very cold.” Beside the grave, Soo Park asked Mother Watson to wait at a little distance. She walked aside and waited. As the astonished missionary watched, the boy began to take off his warm clothing, piece by piece. Surely he won’t take off all his clothing! she thought. He’ll freeze! But the boy stripped himself of everything, laid it all on his mother’s grave, and knelt naked and shivering in the snow. She waited one minute, two minutes. Then she put her gloved hand on his snow covered shoulder. “Come, Soo Park. Your mother in Heaven sees how much you love her. I will help you dress.”

Then in deep sorrow he cried out to the mother he never knew: “Were you colder than this for me, my mother?” And he wept bitterly because he knew of course, she was.

Jesus stripped himself of his royal garments to come and live among us. Was he that cold for us? Surely we never have to wonder if he loves us, or even how much he loves us. He demonstrated that to us nearly 2000 years ago.

This story reminds us of the sacrificial love Peter did not see when he rebuked Jesus, the kind St. Paul says we are to have for one another. Amen.