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Mentored by the word and will of God

by Patricia Datchuck Sánchez

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a brilliant German Lutheran theologian, a gracious pastor and an erudite educator whose faith and witness continue to influence believers in Jesus throughout the world. Bonhoeffer was martyred for his faith and for his resistance to the Nazi regime. His voice can still be heard in his many writings, and his insights have lived on to challenge readers to live and believe authentically, to let their lives reflect a faithful adherence to the ways and will of God. But, by his own admission, Bonhoeffer was not always so intensely committed to Christ and the Gospel.

When telling of his early ministry, Bonhoeffer wrote: "I threw myself into the work in a very unchristian and rather arrogant manner. A mind-boggling ambition ... made my life difficult and separated me from the love and trust of my fellow human beings. At that time I was terribly alone and left to my own devices. ... I had already preached several times, had seen a lot of the church, had given speeches about it and written about it -- but I had still not become a Christian, I was very much an untamed child. ... I had turned this whole business about Jesus into an advantage for myself. ... I had also never prayed, or at least not much and not really. It was from this that the Bible ... freed me. ... It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus must belong to the church?" (*Reflections on the Bible*, Hendrickson Pub., 2004).

Matthew 16:21-27



Only when he realized that he did not belong to himself, but to God and to

others, did Bonhoeffer arrive at that place of surrender where he was willing to accede to God's will rather than his own. He had learned to value the word of God as a living, breathing partner to whom he was to listen and with whom he was graced to dialogue. In each of today's sacred texts, the praying assembly will be privileged to witness the similar experiences of Jeremiah, Paul and Peter as they did their very best to surrender to God's will and God's word. Their witness will call forth our very best efforts at letting God be God, and allowing God's will to direct and shape our own.

From the beginning, Jeremiah struggled with the burden of mediating God's word and will to his contemporaries. But all the while, as he grew into his ministry, he was aware that God's grace would always be greater than his fears and reluctance. So intimately had God spoken to his heart, so powerfully had God's truth grasped his mind that he compared the experience to seduction. Jeremiah did not simply study God's word or meditate on God's will. He knew that he was caught up in a love relationship, and although it cost him dearly, he acquiesced to his divine mentor.

Paul understood that his surrender to God would be compared to a living sacrifice. In his letter to the believers in Rome (second reading), he encouraged his readers to regard their own lives in a similar way. Once offered in sacrifice, believers are to enter into a process of transformation where God's will becomes their own and God's word becomes their constant mentor and guide.

Like Jeremiah and Paul, Peter probably was not fully aware of all that would be asked of him when he accepted the divine invitation to "Follow me." He would never again belong to himself; even his thoughts and hopes and expectations would be transformed. Although he did recognize Jesus and accept him as the Messiah, the Christ, he had no idea of the kind of messiah Jesus would be and the means by which he would bring about the salvation of humankind. He was looking ahead to glory, to victory and to the restoration of prestige and power to his people. But Jesus' words about suffering, death and cross-bearing disciples cast a pall over his hopes, and Peter rebelled. For his efforts in trying to suggest a different outcome for Jesus, Peter was rebuked. Only later would Peter and the other disciples surrender to a way they had not chosen, to a word they did not fully understand, and to a will that was not their own. When they did surrender, however, they found themselves in the embrace of God, whose loving will continued to challenge their every effort and whose saving word spoke to their every need.

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