

In last night's reading, from the homilies of Pope Gregory the Great on the book of Ezekiel, we heard of the savage conflict within Gregory between a life lived as a contemplative and a life lived as a man of action with all the huge burdens which go with being a pope, especially in those troubled times when the Roman Empire was falling apart. In secular terms, this might be posed as the question of how to stay sane in the midst of chaos; in religious terms, how to stay calm and recollected when troubles come; in Christian terms, as how to find Christ in oneself and in others when everything looks bleak, becomes too much, is out of control. For a brief moment in today's gospel passage Peter finds that Christ only to lose it almost immediately when he protests at Jesus' understanding that it involves going to the cross and a total submission to the chaos that life ultimately brings – that total loss of control we know as death. But what we don't know, fail to know and, indeed, cannot know, is that death can be conquered if part and parcel of a life given for others, of a life dedicated to allowing ourselves to find Christ in others and, at the same time, (it's one and the same dynamic) in ourselves. We see the hint of this, here, in these words of Gregory the Great:

*If I preserved the rigorously inflexible mode of utterance that my conscience dictates, I know that the weaker sort of men would recoil from me and that I could never attract them to the goal I desire for them. So I must frequently listen patiently to their aimless chatter.*

For the sake of charity, that is for the sake of Christ, he listens and talks with others; they need it in their quest for Christ though they may not know it. But this immersion in the world's endless chatter draws him into danger and

*I find myself saying the kind of thing that I didn't care to listen to before.*

But this awareness is his salvation, as Christ was so aware of his own danger in living a life dedicated to God in a world which is not dedicated to God, but should be, and can only be if men and women, such as Gregory, continue to exist.

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