

Homily: 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday: 2024: Cycle B: Is 50: 5-9; Ps. 116; James 2: 14-18; Mk. 8:27-35

***“Being a Christian Disciple = Embracing the Cross”***

- 1. The themes of today’s readings seem more appropriate for Lent, but really are valid for every day of the year.** In the **first** reading we hear a passage from the Suffering Servant narrative of Isaiah, which points to the Passion of Jesus. The **second** reading from James should stir up thoughts of repentance in our hearts and minds since we always need to improve in integrating our faith and our daily works. And finally, Jesus tells us in the **Gospel** that unless we pick up our Cross and deny ourselves, we will not have life in Him.
- 2. When we look at Jesus on the Cross what do we think?** A great spiritual writer Fr. Edward Leen from Ireland wrote in a spiritually profound book called *In the Likeness of Christ* that there are four main reactions to the image of Jesus on the Cross in the human mind and heart. The **first** is one of incomprehension: *that this is horrible how this man is suffering in the most horrific way, and I need to look away from this reality as it makes no sense.* The **second** is to say to oneself, if one knows a little of the back story: *this is a just, innocent, man and I wonder why this religious man Jesus is suffering such agony - is there a reason, a purpose to such pain?* Both of those are simply natural reactions without seeing Jesus with the eyes of Faith. The **third** reaction is: *this truly is the Son of God, and He is suffering for our sins.* Finally, the **fourth** reaction is: *that’s the Son of God suffering for my sins, as well as for those of the world, and I should be up there with Him, helping Him to save souls!* **We as believers should have the fourth reaction.** It’s not enough that Jesus died for us, we must be willing to personally share in the mystery of His passion, to die to ourselves, and to pick up our Cross daily and follow Him. The grace is there to do so - if we open our heart to it.
- 3. The Cross** in our lives is all *the trials, tribulations and sufferings* we experience daily because of being a work in progress in terms of holiness, and living in a redeemed yet still sinful world. There is a great battle between good and evil going on in our world and in each of our hearts; though in the end good will

definitively triumph over evil in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus in glory. Our late great Holy Father St. Pope John Paul II wrote a beautiful apostolic letter called *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. In it he points us to the reality that, **in Jesus, human suffering now has become redemptive, if we consciously unite our sufferings with Him.** However, it takes real spiritual maturity for us human beings to grasp that: because we naturally don't like to suffer and our tendency is to complain about suffering, as well as the fact that we don't see the redemptive aspects of suffering right away in this earthly life. But the reality is without the spiritual grace of consciously uniting our sufferings with Jesus on a daily basis **the life of the priest or the married person makes no sense.** If all you do is talk about happy, happy, happy regarding vocations, when the hard times hit, you don't know what to do and so become bitter or bail out. But if you go into those vocations with the Cross at the center then you not only survive, but thrive. The old saying is if you complain about your sufferings you lose - to some degree at least - the graces and merits for yourself and others which those sufferings can bring, not in themselves, but united to Christ and His Cross. Archbishop (Ven) Fulton Sheen said once, "*There is nothing more tragic in earthly life than wasted suffering.*" **What did he mean by that?** Suffering united with Christ is a precious spiritual gift that the Lord uses to purify our souls of sin and selfishness, and we can also offer our sufferings for other's spiritual conversion and in a spirit of **reparation** for our sins and those of the whole world; (this is the whole message of our Lady at Fatima – are we trying daily to do that with our Lady)? Voluntary suffering for souls. See the difference between the **good thief** and the **bad thief** on the Cross. One turned to Jesus in his suffering and was saved. The other turned away from Jesus in his suffering, turned in on himself, and was likely lost forever. The good thief did his Purgatory on the Cross by uniting his sufferings with Jesus and going in essence to Confession to Jesus admitting all his sins – telling the other bad thief: we are on the Cross for our crimes – this man is innocent; and Jesus then said to him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." May we hear those same words when we take our last breath here on earth, as the culmination of uniting our sufferings with Jesus in love throughout our life. God bless you. †