

Deacon Mike's Sermon for June 19, 2019

I would like to wish all of the fathers this weekend a very happy and blessed Father's Day.

There was a devoted father who used to pray with his children and sing to them before they went to sleep----but he quit singing one evening when he heard his 5 year old tell his three year old "If you pretend you're asleep he'll quit singing."

Fatherly devotion doesn't seem to get as much appreciation these days.

Anyways, thanks to all of our fathers for their devotion and dedication.

My brothers and sisters, there was once an elderly, despondent woman in a nursing home.

She wouldn't speak to anyone or request anything. She merely existed---rocking in her creaky old rocking chair.

The old woman didn't have many visitors.

But every other morning, a concerned wise young nurse would go into her room.

He didn't try to speak or ask any questions of the old lady.

He simply pulled up another rocking chair beside the old woman and rocked with her.

Months later, the old woman finally spoke. "Thank you", she said. "Thank you for rocking with me."

Do you think the nurse ever thought, "I'm really not up to this today" or "Am I just wasting my time with someone who doesn't even know or care that I am here?"

Probably.

But he kept on rocking.

Why? Because Christ needed him to be his presence in that rocking chair.

The old woman needed to know that she mattered; that she was important to someone.

The old woman may have been rejected by society, family, neighbors, or friends, creating intense loneliness, we don't know. But she suffered!

Is it really any different than the words of Jesus today in the Gospel? He told his disciples he was to suffer greatly, and abandoned by most all.....

Calvary was going to happen!

But then remarkably, he challenged the twelve, including us here today with the following:

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

Many of us have heard time and again the significance of Christ dying for us.

What greater sacrifice on our behalf could there be than God himself becoming man, suffering and dying so that we might have eternal life?

Jesus suffered and died for our sins, the whole purpose of his life on earth was to get to Calvary..... for us!

But Jesus challenges us each day to follow him to Calvary that we **must** deny ourselves by taking up our crosses in life and follow him.

But he also says to us that we must help carry the crosses of others.

As that nurse did with the older lady.

We too must keep our eyes on Calvary

This is a command when he says “we must”!!!!

Suffering is part of everyone’s life in varying degrees!

It has great purpose as his did. If suffering on that cross saved the world, then our suffering has purpose too.

Suffering is redemptive, if we allow it to be.

St. Paul, wrote in Col 1:24, “Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”

By embracing the many crosses of our daily lives, a person not only can sanctify himself, but also releases a flood of graces for others.

This is what St. Paul meant by completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of the church.

If we suffer with him we can participate in the distribution of these graces to mankind.

This is an awesome thought!

St. Paul is asserting that Jesus did not die so that human beings would never suffer, but that they would know how to suffer.

It doesn’t matter if the suffering is a bloody martyrdom, a toothache, unemployment, in the way of a rebellious child, loneliness or an alcoholic spouse.

All things can be offered up as a prayer, and the intensity of suffering is not as important as the degree of love with which one embraces the cross of Christ in our daily lives.

Once we discover the true meaning of suffering, it can be transformed into a powerful act of intercession.

Maybe it’s the most powerful prayer we have available outside the sacraments.....

But the person, who remains ignorant of the spiritual power of suffering, could be compared to an illiterate person holding a winning lottery ticket.

So much value, all gone to waste.....

St John Paul II who not only taught us how to die, but how to live with suffering.

For example:

It was obvious that JP II loved the poor and the sick, and it was obvious they loved him in return.

While greeting disabled children at an event at Trinity College in Washington D.C., a young girl asked him, "Bless me John Paul".

Leaning over, he replied, "First you bless me." She did and then he returned the favor and the two embraced.

As Archbishop of Krakow John Paul said in a letter to the sick, "although I am young and strong, although I fly in airplanes, climb mountains, ski, I still turn to the weakest, so that by the riches of your suffering, it may bring down the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, and the blessing of God upon my work in the archdiocese."

While at a basilica in Knock, Ireland, he visited with 3,000 disabled people, reminding them that because of the power of redemptive suffering, "there is something very special about your mission in the Church.....Your call to suffering requires strong faith and patience. Yes it means that you are called to love with a special intensity."

Pause.....

And what about you?

Is something tugging at you?

Is there suffering before you, are you suffering?

Is there a rocking chair waiting for you?

Brothers and Sisters,

Trust in his words.

“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”

Amen!

JMJ