

HOMILY for 22nd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel lets us know how Peter hated to hear Jesus talked about suffering and the Cross and wanted to push it away. Thinking about that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Three nuns were each given \$100. The first nun said that she wanted to give hers to some Catholic youth organization; the next stipulated that hers might go to a child welfare organization; and the third nun said she was going out on the street and give it to the first person she ran into that really looked like he needed it.

She went down the street and the first guy she met was an elderly fellow who was dressed in very shabby clothes, so she thrust the \$100 bill into the palm of his hand. She became choked up and really couldn't say anything except, "Godspeed."

Two days later this fellow appeared at the convent and said that he wanted to see the nun that had given him a \$100 bill. He tried to describe her and said that he really didn't know how to describe a nun but, anyway he surmised that it was Sr. Helena.

When she got to the door, the man said he was so grateful for what she had done the other day that he went to the local racetrack and Godspeed had come in first! And he gave her \$800, her cut of his first place winning prize!

That is the reward for embracing suffering and the cross of others. The first test that Jesus put out to His disciples was His suffering & death on the Cross. Here is how Peter reacted to it in this Sunday's Gospel, "...At this, Peter took Jesus aside & began to remonstrate with Him, 'May you be spared, Master! God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you!'" Then, Jesus responded, "Get out of my sight, you Satan! You are trying to make trip & fall. You are not judging by God's standards but by human's. Next, Jesus turned to all of His disciples & said, 'If anyone wishes to come after me, one must deny one's very self, take up one's cross, & begin to follow in my footsteps. Whoever would save one's life will lose it; but whoever loses one's life for my sake will find it. What profit would someone show if one is to gain the whole world & ruin oneself in the process? ...The Son of Man will come with His Father's glory accompanied by His angels. He will repay each person according to one's conduct.'"

As you can see, Peter reacted to Jesus' prophesy of His upcoming death & resurrection by advising His Master to back out of it. Like a typical human reaction, Peter did not want someone he loved & adored like Jesus would have to suffer & die. When Peter made that reaction, he did not fully understand Jesus' role in the divine plan of salvation. For Jesus, the way to Heaven & salvation is the way of the Cross, which is completely contrary to how we humans often think. We humans usually do not like suffering & the cross. We would do anything to avoid it or get far away from it. In fact, this Sunday's First Reading tells us about the suffering of the Lord's followers as following, "...All day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I must cry out, 'violence & outrage is my message; the Word of the Lord has brought me derision & reproach all the day.' I say to myself, 'I will not mention Him, I will speak in His name no more.'" Apparently the Lord's followers had been mocked & derided. The public seemed to reproach & mistreat the Lord's followers. Everyone did not welcome them or want to hear anything about the Lord. They had to face a hostile world. That is the suffering & cross that the Lord's followers/Christians have had to endure every day. In fact, in some countries, Christians have been persecuted for living out their Christian faith. That is the cost & sacrifice for being Christian.

Like Peter, most of us do not like suffering & the cross. We pray that the Lord would take it away or make it disappear for us. For we do not want to suffer & endure our crosses. But, suffering is part of our imperfect life on earth. God also uses crosses & challenges to purify & prepare us for the glorious moments of our resurrection. Surely each & every one of us here could look back on our lives & see how the past crosses & challenges have changed us. For me, I had to endure the Vietnam War & its aftermath. I also had to live under the Communist system for a dozen of years before escaping that hellish way of life to find a life of freedom & peace. My life in a refugee camp also gave me another perspective on what an immigrant has to endure besides having to leave everything behind. A new life in a foreign land like the USA was not a walk in a park for me either. I had to learn everything about a new culture & master the language to adapt to a new life. I recall how difficult it was for me to understand all the school subjects while trying to be at the top of my class. In fact, the current Bishop Robert Barron wanted to show me & other foreign students some compassion by grading the whole class on a curve depending on our grades. Meanwhile, I always worked hard & scored 98 to 100 for all my exams. Needless to say, I did not help my classmates at all; & they sure did not like that.

I also remember looking for my first job to support my education & priesthood training. Nowadays the Diocese & various church groups such as the Knights of Columbus would give seminarians money to buy books & pay for other expenses. In my days, I had to pay for everything, including ten-year-long cost of priesthood training as well as room & board. I received a letter from the Diocese on my fourth year of priesthood stating that all my loan was forgiven. My father also had to pay monthly for the flight cost from the refugee camp to USA. We got no financial assistance from the US government or any charity organization. I took my first jobs in a factory, restaurant, field (apple picking), & so on to be paid at the minimum wage and also to get some kind of job reference. So, it is ludicrous to hear fake news of our time claiming that immigrants got all sorts of government financial support & steal jobs from the natives. That is all made-up stuff by heartless & disgraced politicians & their supporters.

Besides schooling & working challenges, I have also lost family members due to cancer & tragic car accident. I have helped friends deal with unexpected, early death because of suicide & various causes. Those dark nights of the soul were overwhelming to me; but they have helped me to be compassionate & hopeful. I have had to rely on God's grace & support of friends & people around me to overcome those difficult moments & remain focused on my life mission. Those crosses in my life have also made me strong & resilient amidst of all sorts of challenging situations. I have been changed for the better; & I am ready for Heaven because of my daily crosses.

My dear brothers & sisters, St. Mother Teresa once said, "Don't pray that the Lord would take away our crosses. Pray that He would give us enough strength to carry them." That is why we Christians have come to the Lord at Mass & in prayer every day/weekend to ask for strength & endurance to carry our daily crosses. For we believe that they will purify us & get us ready for Heaven & all the rewards in the end. After all, we have seen how the suffering & Cross of Jesus had helped Him prepare for His glorious resurrection & complete His mission of human salvation.