

22nd (QA&SJ) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

Jesus was at the peak of his popularity and many people gathered and listened to him. He is the most sought-after speaker. His disciples enjoyed his crowd-drawing fame. He was undeniably the superstar! Last Sunday Jesus blessed Peter after he declared, “*You are Christ the Son of the living God.*” Then Jesus gave him the huge task of shepherding the Church. Peter’s confession is the culmination of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and the point of arrival of the disciples’ faith. Peter was utterly shocked when Jesus speaks about going to Jerusalem to suffer greatly and be killed. *How could the Messiah be subjected to violent pain, and then be killed?* The cross of Christ has revealed both the “*power and wisdom*” of God himself. God, in his infinite wisdom, sent his Son. Indeed the idea of God emptying himself of his Godhead for the sake of mankind is foolishness. Yet, it is through this ‘*foolishness*’ that we achieved our reconciliation with him through His Son.

Jesus was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. The Jews were looking for signs and miracles, the Greeks, on the other hand, were looking for wisdom. *How could they understand the message of the cross?* Paul was keenly aware of this and exhorts in his letter to the Romans, “*Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God.*” The challenge posed by his words is illustrated in the gospel. Peter is

outraged by Jesus' prediction of his passion - protesting, "*A messiah that suffers? Heaven forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you!*" To the disciples' surprise Jesus exploded, "*Get out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to my path!*" Peter called 'Satan?' The rock becomes a *stumbling block*? Peter must have thought, "*I should have kept my mouth shut!*" Jesus rebuked Peter's intense reaction. "*You are not judging by God's standards but by man's.*" *What are man's standards? "Be comfortable, seek security, get praises and enjoy life."* To be transformed from within and enabled to think as God does is not an easy task to do. Peter must learn once again what true discipleship means: "*If you want to follow me, deny yourself, and take up your cross.*"

After her husband's checkup the doctor told his wife. Your husband is suffering from a severe stress disorder. If you don't do the following he will surely die. Each morning fix him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant at all times. For lunch and dinner make him a nutritious meal. No chores, no nagging. Show him your great love. Do this for the next year and he'll regain his health completely. Later the husband asked her, "*What did the doctor say?*" She replied, "*He said you're going to die.*" **Suffering and pain are realities of life.** The witness of Jeremiah makes that clear. His honest speech is at once complaint and surrender. He feels betrayed by God for putting in his mouth words of such constant outrage and violence. Rich or poor, healthy, strong or weak,

we are not exempted from sickness, problems, and other challenges of life. Peter represents each and every one of us who are caught up in anxiety between faith and doubt. Christ taught us a lesson about suffering and gave meaning to it. *“Take up your cross and be my disciple”* Love leads to imitation of the beloved. In the words of St. Paul: *“If you suffer with Christ, you will also rise with him.”* The teaching *“you must carry your cross”* does not mean acceptance of our fate and not improving our human condition. The Church has been supportive of science, technology and medicine for humanity’s advancement but not those that curtail or destroy life.

The cross that Christ refers to is suffering that is unavoidable: *Natural calamities - hurricanes, earthquakes, diseases, covid-19, accidents, loneliness, undeserved and unjust treatments, are samples of evil that are beyond our control.* There are pains that are inflicted or caused by people: *murder, kidnappings, rioting, looting, slander, lies and a lot more.* There would be less pain and misery if we respect the rights of others, if we are less selfish, less greedy and more concerned with others’ needs and feelings. There is no other road to a meaningful life that will lead to eternal life, but the way of the cross—*the narrow, steep, winding road of sacrifice and suffering.* There is another road. It is *wide, downhill and straight... straight to hell.* In short, we should follow our Lord’s teachings, *“then God will repay everyone according*

to their conduct.” Let us be imitators to our models who were tested in time – the Saints and those who live exemplary Christian lives.

Everything we do in this life is our investment—*how we study and relate with people, how we are faithful to our tasks and our relationships, how we are kind, how we thank our God.* Do not look at them as requirements, demands, punishments, burdens, or crosses. Treat them as investments, the proper conduct expected of us. We will get our benefits and our fair share. Count on it. **God knows every good deed and every suffering.** He cares about every cry. He notices every seed planted. He enjoys every love sown. But let us not do things just for the recompense. **The joy of doing good is itself the reward. God’s compensation will be the profit and extra benefit.** *Lord, give me the will and strength to follow you. (St. Ignatius) Give me only your love and your grace. That’s enough for me. Amen.*