

## **HOMILY for 22<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A**

This Sunday Gospel talks about imitating Jesus & carrying our daily crosses faithfully with Him. As I ponder on that message, I'm reminded this classic cute story I'd like to share with you.

A Jewish couple have a son who is very smart, but a bit troublesome. At the age of 5, they send him to a yeshiva & within a week they hear that things aren't going well. After a couple of months, they are asked to take him out of school, since he is not setting a good example for other children.

Things go from bad to worse. They send him to the local public school & by the end of the first semester they are asked to remove him because he has a serious behavior problem. Then they send him away to military school &, to their dismay, there too he's considered incorrigible.

Finally in desperation, the parents take him to the only place left – the local parochial school. A week passes, & then another, & a month goes by & they don't hear anything from the school. There're no complaints about his performance, no report of trouble. Their curiosity is really aroused when he comes home at the end of the semester with a report card showing 3 B's & the rest A's. And at the end of the second semester, he has straight A's on his report card, & his performance has been so good that he is the top student in his class.

At last, his mother can contain herself no longer & she says to him, "Son, what's going on? We send you to the Yeshiva & they throw you out. The public school can't deal with you, & even at military school you were considered incorrigible. But now with these Catholics, you're not only behaving yourself, you're getting wonderful grades."

"Well Mama," says the boy. "The truth is that I wasn't impressed by those other places, but the first thing I see when I go into this school is a Jewish guy nailed to a cross, & I know it's time for me to get my act together!"

Anyway, when we see a cross, we're reminded of the one that Jesus was crucified on & condemned to death. We might also recall the ones of the two criminals on both sides of Jesus. They were put to death for their criminal conducts. So, a cross is usually about death, punishment, condemnation, or sinful conducts. When we encounter daily troubles or life challenges, we refer to those as spiritual crosses. These crosses symbolize pain, suffering, hurdle, daily troubles, or life challenges. As you can see, whether we talk about a spiritual cross or a physical one, it usually means problem, pain, sadness, & death. Needless to say, everyone does not like the cross; & they will do anything to avoid it. They might even try to help their families & friends to stay away from it if possible. That's what Peter wanted to do for Jesus as he attempted to talk Jesus out of embracing the Cross for human salvation. He said, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." Peter apparently wanted Jesus - his friend & Master - to stay away from the Cross.

Ironically, God has chosen the Cross as the way to bring us salvation & lead us to Heaven. God could have picked other ways to deliver God's forgiveness & call us to come back home. Instead, God made a personal sacrifice & offered God's only Son Jesus on the Cross for our salvation. Would anyone here want to do the same & make a personal sacrifice for the common good like that? Apparently some Christians have followed God's example & made their own sacrifices for a higher purpose. Priests, nuns, brothers, & religious monks have

dedicated their lives to serve God's Church & share Jesus' Good News with the world. Thousands of missionaries have left behind a secured life & volunteered to serve the poor around the world. Hundreds of heroic Christians have suffered persecutions & death to hold high the Cross of Jesus for the world to see. Many devout Christians have continued their Lord's example & silently carried out their daily crosses with Him. All these people have paid close attention to Jesus' advice in today's Gospel & realized the meaning of the cross in their lives. Here's what Jesus said to His disciples in this Sunday's Gospel, "...Whoever wishes to come after me must deny oneself, take up one's cross & follow me. For whoever wishes to save one's life will lose it, but whoever loses one's life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world & forfeit one's life?"

Apparently, Jesus challenged His followers to make personal sacrifices & faithfully carry their daily crosses if they want to be His disciples. That's a huge cost for anyone who wants to follow Jesus & be a Christian! Over the years, I've read about brave Christians who have to endure all kinds of sufferings & crosses for the love of Jesus – from the death of their loved ones to the lack of basic necessities. I've seen countless faithful Christians who have continued to hold high the Cross of Jesus & move forward in spite of their personal tragedies & daily challenges. Those examples have brought tears to my eyes & challenged me to embrace my own daily crosses. They've also made me wonder if God still loves us, or if God is around to help God's faithful ones. But, those courageous & faithful Christians have gradually taught me how to trust in God's plan for me & how to keep my hope alive amidst my life challenges. They've shown me how to let God hold me close to Him in those difficult time & guide me through those dark nights of the soul. Today's First Reading describes my experience best this way, "You duped me, O Lord, & I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, & you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter, everyone mocks me... The Word of the Lord has brought me derision & reproach all the day... But, it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." So in the end, God's love will fill our hearts; & it will triumph over our doubts & all of our life challenges.

Recently I've witnessed how God's love triumphed over the cross of cancer as a dying man faced the end of his life on earth with peace. Tim is a devout Catholic & a loving, protective father. He worked hard to provide a secured life for his family & create good memories with them through lots of family events. He had plans for himself & his family & looked forward to his retirement. But before those things could come about, he had to face the cross of cancer without any chance of surviving it. In spite of that bleak prognosis, Tim did not curse his misfortune or try to run away from his cross. Instead, he embraced it gracefully & began to get his house in order. He asked me to give him Last Rite & went through Confession one last time. He also requested Sr. Mai – our Parish's Minister to the Sick & homebound to bring him Communion & pray the Rosary with him to the end. Tim's courage to carry his heavy cross to the end made me cry & inspire me to walk my own journey of the cross with Jesus faithfully. Tim surely understood Paul's message in today's Second Reading as it said, "Brothers & sisters, ...Do not conform yourself to this age but to be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good & pleasing & perfect." Tim realized the will & mission of God for him; & he completed it perfectly. I thank God for showing me Tim's incredible example of carrying the cross with Jesus. We know where Tim is right now & what Jesus would reward him in God's Kingdom.

My dear brothers & sisters, carrying our daily cross with Jesus is not only our mission but also our Christian way of life. I thank God for the example of Jesus & other saintly Christians' for showing us how to do that as His disciples. This Sunday we're called to take on that mission with courage & dedication. That's how it will give meaning to our life here on earth & bring us great reward at the end in God's Kingdom.