

August 30, 2020
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jer 20:7-9
Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Rom 12:1-2
Mt 16:21-27

CHASING SUFFERING?

What is the best way to purify gold? The best way to purify gold is through fire. Impurities of the gold will be gone when tested in fire. If 24 karats pure gold is best tested in fire, **is it possible that our Christian character best tested through the fire of sufferings/difficulties/trials?**

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting that we chase or run after sufferings/difficulties/trials in order to be purified. To go after it is pure stupidity/foolishness. We are not called to be stupid/foolish. What I am saying is this – we will not chase sufferings/difficulties/trials but when it comes our way we will not run away from it. Rather, we will courageously face it. We will use it to bring out the best in us. We will use it to remove whatever impurities we have in our being. We will use it to our advantage. We will utilize it to become victors and not victims.

This Covid-19 pandemic we are in is, no doubt, a suffering we did not chase or run after. It just came our way. It is affecting us a lot. Yes, we can gather but with limitations. We want to travel but we are afraid. We have to social distance, sanitize our hands, and wear masks regularly to protect ourselves and others. It is hard. But, it is harder for those who have lost a loved one due to this virus. They are not allowed to be near the deathbed of the one they loved. Truly, things are different now. Nonetheless, this suffering have purified us in some ways.

- It helped us see the importance of spending quality time with family, the domestic Church. Parents have more time with their kids. There is more opportunity to know each other now compared before. *(I have seen on social media families on hiking/bonding together. Prior to the pandemic, they were not able to do it.)*
- The suffering we are experiencing due to this pandemic reminded us that life can be wiped out on this earth anytime. We are now face to face with the reality of death. Thus, we have realized that in life what is important **"is not the years in our life but rather the life in our years."**
- This suffering also has brought us to look to God when otherwise we would just ignore him. We have seen the need to pray more and beg God's mercy be given to us. We recognized that to reach God's heart we have to kneel in prayer.

These are just some of the lessons we can learn from this suffering. We can attest/testify that indeed through sufferings, good can come out from it. **Did you know that our saints believed that suffering is necessary for salvation?** Here are some of the thoughts of our Catholic saints.

- **St. Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090 - August 20, 1153) said, "**If things always went wrong, no one could endure it; if things always went well, everyone would become arrogant.**"
- **St. John Vianney** (May 08, 1786 – August 04, 1859) said, "**You wonder why God, who is goodness itself, allows us to suffer... But, what would you think of a doctor who lost his patient because he was afraid to give him the necessary but unpleasant treatment?**"
- **St. Cyprian of Carthage** (200 – 258 AD) said, "**But different kinds of sufferings are imposed on us to test and prove us, and many forms of temptations are inflicted upon us by loss of wealth, burning fevers, torments of wounds, by the death of dear ones. Nothing else distinguishes the unjust and the just more than this, that in adversities the unjust man complains and blasphemes because of impatience, while the just man is proved by patience, as it is written: 'I thy sorrow endure and in thy humiliation keep patience, for gold and silver are tried in fire.'**"
- **St. Augustine** (November 14, 354 – August 28, 430 AD) said, "**Let us understand that God is a physician, and that suffering is a medicine for salvation, not a punishment for damnation.**"

It is clear to all our Catholic saints that suffering is part of the demands of discipleship. And this is what Jesus is telling the disciples in the gospel proclaimed when he said, "**Take up your cross.**" He is conveying to them that, as disciples, they should be 'willing to suffer' for the sake of the Good News. Peter does not get it. He tries to block the necessity of the suffering of Jesus, his Master. He does not understand that in Jesus' sufferings God's love will shine the most. Thus, Jesus reprimands Peter by saying: "**Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.**" We see here how Peter shifted from **Peter the Rock** (*that was last Sunday's gospel*) to **Peter the Blockade** (*in today's gospel.*) [*Later on, we know that Peter got the message for he himself has willingly suffered for his love for Christ.*]

We are the 'modern disciples of Christ.' He expects us to do something for the sake of the Gospel. He anticipates our willingness to carry our cross and obey joyfully his commands. He asks us: **What are you willing to sacrifice for the missionary activities of the Church?** Aside from hiking and other activities during this time of pandemic, **how are you going to train in the faith your family? Is spending time in praying and reading the Bible part of your busy schedules?**

Discipleship has lots of demands. It calls us to action. Part of the action is the courage to face the sufferings coming our way. Like Jesus, our Master, we will not run away from it. We will use it to make sure that God's love shines the most during this time of difficulties.

Lord Jesus, you did not promise to remove sufferings. Rather, you showed us how to handle it. Please give us the grace to handle the sufferings coming our way in a Christ-like manner. Amen.