

August 21, 2022
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Is 66:18-21
Ps 117:1-2
Heb 12:5-7,11-13
Lk 13:22-30

DISCIPLINED LIFE!

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (Nov. 6, 1860 – June 29, 1941), the great pianist from Poland, was approached by one of his fans and said: **"Sir, you are a genius."** He replied, **"Madam, before I was a genius, I was a drudge."** He continued: **"If I missed practice one day, I noticed it; if I missed practice two days, the critics noticed it; if I missed three days, my family noticed it; if I missed four days, my audience noticed it."**

The great **Michael Jordan**, who brought 6 NBA Championship Trophies to the Chicago Bulls during the 90's, was said to practice basketball every day for 5 to 6 hours. He said in one of his interviews, **"Every day in practice...was a competition. So, when the game comes, there isn't nothing that I haven't already practiced. It's just a routine. Whatever happens in the game, okay I've done this before."**

The Golden State Warriors superstar **Steph Curry**, according to Coach Erik Spoelstra, shoots 500 jump shots a day during practice. That adds up to 3,500 shots a week and 18,250 shots a month! Curry's work ethic is clearly paying off, as he is currently one of the best shooters in the NBA.

What do Paderewski, Jordan, and Curry have in common? They were very disciplined in polishing their craft/professions. To master it, they did not vacillate to put hours and hours of practice/training every day. They did the same drill, day in and day out. Thus, the result was a no brainer.

These three great individuals were truly disciplined with regard to their craft. The word **'discipline,'** at times, gets a bad connotation. It is commonly associated with **'punishment for bad behavior.'** Others look at it as **'mere compliance,'** or **'enforcement.'** This is far from the truth when we look at the origin of this word. The word **'discipline'** comes from the Latin word **'disciplina'** which means **'instruction and teaching.'** And the root word of **'disciplina'** is **'discipulu,'** meaning **'disciple' or 'student.'** To embrace discipline, therefore, entails willingness to be instructed and trained to achieve meaningful objectives.

One of the lessons that our gospel proclaimed imparts to us today is about 'discipline.' The image of the door or narrow gate speaks highly of this lesson. During the time of the Lord Jesus, it was customary/typical for teachers to close the door on tardy/late students. The teachers would not allow them back for a whole week in order to teach them a lesson in discipline and faithfulness. The Lord Jesus used this custom/practice to warn his listeners not to fall into bedlam. As Master and Teacher, he was calling everyone who would like to follow him to live a disciplined and faithful lives.

What happens when discipline and faithfulness are set aside? The Lord Jesus warned his listeners the possibility of being excluded from entering the narrow gate. The narrow gate/door that the Lord Jesus was referring to was himself. Hence, unfaithfulness to him and not trying to be disciplined in following his standards might not bring salvation to those who long for it.

The Lord Jesus is very consistent in teaching us the importance of discipline and faithfulness to his ways. **Remember the disciplines that are always being reiterated to us on Ash Wednesday? What are those disciplines?** Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We are called to practice these disciplines, not only during the Lenten Season, but throughout our faith-life journey. These disciplines are primarily for our own good so we can be Christ-like in the world we live in.

As I reflect on the Holy Eucharist/Mass, it dawned on me that this celebration is a very disciplined celebration. As a priest, I cannot just do away with the 'matter and form' of the celebration. **Why?** It is simply because to do it 'my way' and not the 'prescribe' practice would be considered unfaithfulness to the Mass instituted by Christ Jesus himself. The Mass is not a place wherein we can do what we want to do. We cannot be just sitting the whole time (unless we are physically challenged) when the whole congregation is standing or kneeling. We cannot be singing because we just want to when the whole congregation is listening to the proclamation of the Word. To put it simply, here in the celebration, it is not 'anything goes.' There is a clear order of the celebration. The celebration is so disciplined that others find it boring. **Is it really boring?** If we truly believe that the Lord Jesus is the one speaking to us in the Word proclaimed and, in the Bread, broken and shared, we will not find it humdrum. Rather, we will find it exciting precisely because we believe that the Lord Jesus teaches new lessons in life every time we celebrate it.

St. Ambrose, a great saint of the 4th century, reflecting on the discipline of receiving the Body of Christ daily, said: **"If it is "daily bread," why do you take it once a year? Take daily what is to profit you daily. Live in such a way that you may deserve to receive it daily. He who does not deserve to receive it daily, does not deserve to receive it once a year."**

As we continue our Eucharistic celebration, let us pray for the grace to be disciplined and faithful to the teachings and ways of the Lord Jesus. May our assiduous effort of entering the 'narrow gate' give us the complete victory in the end time.

God bless and stay safe!