

## **Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - If we want to be truly great, we must convert through suffering**

Oct 17, 2021

**The prophecy Isaiah wrote in this Sunday's First Reading (53:10-11) was one of various prophecies about how the Messiah, through suffering, would save God's people. In other words, God was preparing his Chosen people to recognize the promised Messiah by "affliction" and "being crushed in iniquity." These are direct allusions to the passion, crucifixion, and death of our Lord Jesus Christ – 600 years ahead of his time. And it was precisely through those sufferings that Jesus would take all of our sins upon himself, atone for them, and re-open the gates of heaven for us. The Suffering Servant is a prophecy of Our Lord, and the “cup” to which Jesus refers in today's Gospel is the suffering he knows he must endure for us. Suffering has a purpose in this case: through Christ's suffering, his “descendants” will receive a long life, the Lord's will is accomplished, and many are justified. By His suffering, Our Lord wants to convert us, like He converted St. Paul who lost his physical sight but “ see the true light in its fullness”: the light of eternal glory. No one likes needless suffering. We seek to alleviate it, but it is not needless if it has a purpose.**

**Conversion is fundamental to the story, since we will not be part of God's new creation without it. And it is quite clear from the Bible's storyline that we will praise God forever in the heavenly city for redeeming us, for rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and including us in the kingdom of his beloved Son. We will never forget God's decisive, saving work in our lives through Christ's cross and resurrection. It will always be central to our praises.**

In Mark's telling of his final journey to Jerusalem, **Jesus three times warns the twelve of the fate that will overtake him in the Holy City.** During this time, Jesus must have reflected frequently upon the Servant Songs of Isaiah's writings. The first reading is a brief excerpt from the greatest of these Songs. **The Servant who will bring to realization the true destiny of Israel will know great ‘suffering ... offering his life as an atonement’; he will take the ‘faults ’of the people ‘upon himself’.** But by doing so he will turn the nation's failure into God's final triumph, as he achieves ‘what the Lord wishes’. **‘By his suffering my servant shall justify many’.** With these things in his mind, Jesus tells his twelve the ordeal that lies ahead of them. **‘You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink with me the cup of suffering, share in the ordeal in which I am soon to be plunged?’** Jesus tells us it is not the size of a person's entourage nor the position of authority a person holds that demonstrates greatness. The standard of greatness in God's kingdom is the standard of the cross.

True conversion is much more than a reform of personal morals. It is a revolution in our understanding of what our life ‘in Christ ’means; it is the starting point of true discipleship. Jesus now urges the twelve to be converted, to broaden their vision, change their values – by identifying with the paradoxical ways of God that are the subject of his reflections as he journeys to Jerusalem. If they are to be leaders and guides in the community of disciples, their exercise in authority must be more than their ambitions for a place of prestige and power. Jesus is calling his disciples (and us) to share in spreading his gospel by giving themselves completely to his way of life - be of service and availability to those under our control.

St Paul in the Second Reading (Hebrews 4:14-16) tells the glory that Our Lord received for drinking the cup of suffering: he became our High Priest by sacrificing himself. Although not mentioned in today's passage, the Letter to the Hebrews explains that Our Lord, in sacrificing

himself, is consecrated a priest. A priest mediates between God and others and offers sacrifice to God on their behalf. In imitation of Christ, a priest also sacrifices himself for others, the greatest sacrifice. **Suffering and trials are the path to glory for a disciple of Christ, but not senselessly: through suffering and trials we serve others and give our lives for them to be “ransomed” from sin.**

**Saint Vincent Ferrer (23 January 1350 – 5 April 1419) was a Valencian Dominican friar and preacher, who gained acclaim as a missionary and a logician.** It is recorded that a man, who had led a disorderly life, found himself at the point of death, and was given up by the doctors. The thought of eternity presenting itself forcibly to his mind, he was overcome with remorse for his past faults. Yet, not trusting himself to the mercy of God, he gave way to despair, thinking that he was unworthy of forgiveness. When Saint Vincent Ferrer heard of this, he went to the dying man and tried to move him to repentance by encouraging him to hope in the divine mercy. **He reminded him that Jesus Christ died for each one of us and that He, as a merciful father, receives the prodigal son into His arms; that He pardoned Zachaeus, Mary Magdalen and the Good Thief on His cross, and that even if his sins were as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore, the mercy of God would never be overcome, because it is infinite and eternal.** Such words, which would have sufficed to soften the hardest of hearts, only moved this wretched sinner to further blasphemies. He gnashed his teeth, protesting that he would not seek pardon of Jesus Christ, but would die in his sins in order to displease and offend Him the more. At these words Saint Vincent did not lose courage, but, enlightened by an inspiration from Heaven he answered: **"You must be converted, in order that the infinite mercy of God may shine forth the more in you."** Turning then to the bystanders, he commenced to recite the holy Rosary addressed to Holy Mary on behalf of this unhappy man. As in the words of Saint Bernard, Mary is the hope of those who despair. The recital of the Rosary had hardly been completed, when that stubborn sinner was changed into another man. In the twinkle of an eye he had become as meek as a lamb, and inviting the Saint to draw near to him, **he uttered the sweet Name of Mary. Then, shedding floods of tears, he confessed his sins like the Good Thief on the cross. He received the sacraments and died with every sign of an edifying conversion.**

We Christians are made to glorify God and to enjoy him forever both in this world and in the world to come. **Lord, may we be converted ourselves and persevere each day and draw closer to your Most Merciful Heart, so that we can touch others and show them your Infinite Goodness. And Lord, also grant us the grace to be instruments of conversion of hearts to remove the spiritual blindness in the world and recognize all children as a beautiful gift of your Most Holy Divine Providence. Amen.**