

Second Sunday of Lent B - Without Cross there won't be Resurrection, Without Suffering there won't be true Joy!

February 28, 2021.

We are still at the beginning of Lent, the season of repentance and penitence, but in this Sunday's readings, the Church is already talking to us about the Resurrection. In the gospel, at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-10), Peter, James, and John get a glimpse of Christ's eternal glory which Jesus claimed fully after the resurrection. St Paul, in the second reading (Romans 8:31b-34), writes passionately about God's power and faithfulness as revealed in Christ. And he actually changes his emphasis mid-sentence to take the spotlight off Christ's death on the cross and let it shine on his glorious resurrection: "**Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.**" In the first reading about Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18), it narrates the release of Isaac from his bonds giving him new life which took place almost 2000 years before Christ. This too is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. Even the Responsorial Psalm (116:9), speaks about "**I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living. I am your servant, the son of your handmaid; you have loosed my bonds.**" It is pointing our attention towards Christ's glorious resurrection.

And yet, Easter is still more than a month away! What's going on here? It's very simple, really. Lent is indeed meant to be a time of sacrifice and reflection in which we acknowledge the weight of suffering in the world and in our lives, suffering that always has its roots in sin. This suffering is always part of the story of every human life, with or without Christ; but with Christ, it is not the end of the story. **Crosses purify us of selfishness, teach us to lean more on Christ and to have a greater experience of his wisdom and joy - his resurrection.** The cross and resurrection are two sides of the same coin; we must never allow ourselves to think of one without thinking of the other.

Ryan Hall, the professional marathon runner, holds the U.S. record in the half marathon. He competed for the United States in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, and he understands this concept well. Ryan is a Christian, and his running career has always been linked to his faith. While in eighth grade and doing a 15-mile run in his hometown of Big Bear Lake, California, he suddenly felt a calling to compete in running at the highest levels: "**I felt God had blessed me with this talent,**" he said in an interview years later. Since then, Ryan has been trying to glorify God by developing his running talent and bearing witness to his faith. While training for the Olympics, he had a disciplined daily schedule: rise early, eat breakfast, run 10 to 12 miles; eat lunch, have a massage or an ice bath to ease the muscles; take an afternoon nap to recover; run another 5 to 6 miles, go to the gym for strength and flexibility exercises; eat dinner, go to bed. On the night before a big race, Ryan's schedule breaks the mold. Instead of relaxing or listening to music, he watches Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, to get mentally prepared. **The example of Christ's suffering and resurrection helps him manage his pain during the race.** He recalled being in agony in the final two miles of the London Marathon in 2007, where his top performance shocked his competitors. His body was being stifled by a combination of 70 degree heat and a suffocating pace he had set earlier in the race. How was he able to keep up his pace? Here's how he explained it: "**I actually saw visions of the scarred body of Jesus, and it made me able to go on.**" If we bear our crosses with Christ, we will also experience the power of Christ's resurrection - the two always go together.

This balance between the cross and the resurrection, sorrow and joy, helps make sense out of a lot of confusing aspects of the spiritual life. Since both are necessary for

our growth in holiness, just as sunlight and darkness are both necessary for the growth of plants, God allows us to experience both, in accordance with the timing that he deems best. In the resurrection moments, God grants us exceptional clarity and satisfaction in our Christian journey. But, like spoiled children, we tend to hold onto those good feelings as if they were God himself. We echo Peter's comment in the Gospel: ***"Lord it is good for us to be here! Let's just put up some tents and never leave!"*** But earth is not heaven, and God loves us too much to let us settle for anything less than the fullness of his friendship. And so, he leads us down from our high mountains and walks with us to Calvary, letting us share the weight of his cross. **On mountaintops he strengthens our hope, but with crosses he strengthens our love,** as we learn to cling to him more than to his gifts. And that's what Christian wisdom is all about. What can we do to speed up our Christian wisdom learning curve? The easiest way is to work together. We are all on the road to Calvary and are constantly tested by disappointments and trials on the way. Christ promises a heavenly future to all willing to share the hardship on that pathway. We can only be true disciples by sharing our faith and assisting others making the journey in our company. God encourages others through our kind words and deeds so that the glory of the Lord shines through our lives, making us grow brighter as we are turned into the image of the one we are to reflect. **By carrying each other's crosses, we combine the joy of Christian charity with the pain of our earthly exile - keeping perfectly in mind both the cross and the resurrection.**

Lent is a time for us to take a close look at ourselves and consider what we have to do to conquer selfishness and sin in our own lives. The various exercises of Lent help us to dive deeper into our commitment to the Lord. Lent helps us to take those steps we need to be bound to God's plan. Let's pray today for the grace to be part of the plan, part of the sacrifice, and part of the Glory. ***"Just as you share in sufferings so you will share in the divine glory*** (2 Corinthians 1:7). As St John Vianney said: ***"Everything is a reminder of the Cross. We ourselves are made in the shape of a cross"***

Lord Jesus, there is no other road to heaven than the road of your cross. Help us to carry ours! At times, its weight can push us down to the ground. But we know that with your help we can put aside our fears, our impatience, and our complaints, to follow you with joy for the salvation of many souls.