

5th Sunday of Lent
Homily Based on Jer 31: 31-34; Heb 5: 7-9; John 12:20-33

The suffering and death of Jesus gained for us eternal life; the inspiration and strength to bear our crosses patiently and follow Jesus to Calvary.

A priest is walking around the neighborhood. From a distance, he sees a very small boy trying to press the doorbell of one house. But he is very small, and he cannot reach the doorbell. The priest, out of pity, walks toward the boy, and stands behind him. Then, placing his hand kindly on the child's shoulder, leans over and presses the doorbell long and hard. Afterwards, the priest smiles kindly and asks, "And now what, little guy?" With a mischievous smile, the boy hurriedly replies, "Now, it's time to run!"

Dear friends, much of the troubles in the world are caused by people who would rather run away than face their problems, difficulties, and sufferings. Drug addiction, divorce, and all vices are results of this desire to run away and avoid difficult situations. But we have to be constantly reminded that suffering is part of our human existence in this world. Problems and difficulties are realities in the world that we cannot avoid. It is utterly pointless to run away from them.

We see suffering everywhere. These days as I walk to the hospitals as chaplain, I see people with various illnesses undergoing pain and suffering. For many of us, it is understandable if those who are suffering are the evil people. But that is not the case. What we see are innocent people and children who suffer the most. Sometimes I struggle to speak to them. I do not know what to say. And sometimes we are tempted to complain to God. Why do the good and innocent suffer? If God is love and full of

mercy, why does He allow these people to suffer? If God is all-powerful, why does He not put a stop to suffering?

Dear friends, the answer to all these questions is right in front of us: the image of Jesus nailed to the cross. God became man like us in all things but sin. Jesus is God in human flesh. It is God who is nailed to the cross. It is God who suffers and dies. And He never complained. He did not succumb to the temptation to use His powers to get down from the cross. He did not stop His own suffering. All these He endured so that we can be saved and have the fullness of life.

The image of Jesus on the cross simply tells us one very important truth: God has no intention of taking away suffering from the world. In fact, He, too, suffered, for in His unfathomable wisdom, He knows there is great value in suffering. What is that? In today's Gospel we see Jesus saying, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:24). The grain, of course, does not actually die but is totally transformed into something completely new: roots, leaves and more fruitful grains. In other words, dying to self is to be a blessing for others.

Dear friends, if we are suffering in this world, the cross tells us that God is also suffering – for us and with us. We are not suffering alone; God is one with us in our suffering. The suffering and death of Jesus gained for us eternal life. He was the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and His death brought life and salvation to the whole world. This truth must give us inspiration and strength to bear our crosses patiently and follow Jesus to Calvary.

Unfortunately, many people still remain in the darkness of death due to selfishness and sin. Selfishness is what prevents us from living life to the full. Jesus reminds us: “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” (Jn 12:25). The one who gives up his or her worldly desires and self-focused agendas and allows oneself to be subjected to others’ liberation will find a much richer and enriching fullness of life. Clinging on to a life in this world, which ultimately is passing away, makes us blind to the beauty and infinite goodness of eternal life. On the other hand, willingness to let go of this life for the sake of eternity helps us discover the fullness of life here and hereafter.

Yes, dear friends, it is only in dying to our self that we begin to live. Like the bread that must be broken in order to be shared to others; and like the candle that must be consumed in order to give light, so also, we must learn to give of ourselves, to die to ourselves, in order for others to live. In so doing, we make our own lives more meaningful and fruitful, for we are able to share fully in the life Jesus – a life of total self-giving. For truly, as beautifully put by St. Francis of Assisi, “it is in giving that we receive; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

Today’s second reading from the letter to the Hebrews invites us to reflect on the depth of Jesus’ humanity and His willingness to suffer for our sake. It encourages us to cultivate a deep prayer life, seeking God’s guidance and intervention in our struggles. It reminds us of the importance of obedience and trust in Jesus as the source of our eternal salvation. Ultimately, it calls us to live lives that reflect our faith in Him.

We are already in the Fifth Sunday of Lent. We celebrate this Sunday as passion Sunday. During the remaining days of Lent, let us seriously do some acts of self-

denial: fasting, abstinence, almsgiving, sacrifices and acts of penance. These will surely help us practice dying. Saying “no” to our pleasurable vices, saying “no” to a comfortable and pampered lifestyle, saying “no” to selfish search for worldly gain and success will be very painful for most of us and could be equivalent to dying. But we have to, in order that we may be able to share ourselves with others – so that others may live. This is what martyrdom means nowadays, not anymore bloody martyrdom, but equally painful and fruitful martyrdom.

As we continue our Lenten journey may the Lord Almighty grant us the courage, deep faith, and trust in Him. With His Grace Let us cultivate the virtue of self-sacrifice, that we may not run away from the problems, pains, and suffering.