

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 64

Reading 1 - Is 49:3, 5-6

Responsorial Psalm - Ps 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

Reading 2 - 1 Cor 1:1-3

Gospel - Jn 1:29-34

I love this story about Pope Saint John Paul II. Maybe you have heard it. It is a story pertaining to the topic we will discuss today; suffering.

After concelebrating Mass with the Holy Father in his private chapel, a priest from Michigan had a brief opportunity to meet the Pope. The priest had a broken leg and stood on crutches as John Paul II approached him in the receiving line of guests. He said to the Pope with a twinge of humor and self-pity, "I broke my leg. Can I please have your blessing?" John Paul replied, "Don't waste your suffering." The Holy Father raised his hand, blessed the priest, and then with an open palm, thumped the priest on the head.

Sounds rough doesn't it? We often hear, "Give it up to Jesus." When I was assigned to St. Jude's in Rochester, I came in one day for Mass and told Fr. Alford, "If I double over in pain and run off the altar, don't worry. I have a kidney stone working its way on through." Fr's reply was less than expected, "Well, give your suffering up to Jesus. He did that for you." Tough words but oh so true. Today we learn of Christ's baptism in the Jordan. St. John the Baptist, in another Gospel account states of his unworthiness and that it is Jesus who should baptize him. Jesus did not need baptism. He was not born with our original sin. So why did he desire baptism? Jesus is fully God and fully human. He took baptism in order to take on our human condition. Our sufferings. For our salvation. To save us.

I love the line, "A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me". Such a powerful statement from John. He ranks above all things. He is God, and God is outside our realm of time. Yes, Jesus existed before John. Before time itself. He is the Logos, or the Word. Fully Human, fully divine. And yet he came into our time as a man, so yes what John said it true. He became man to fulfill the prophecy and save us from that original sin. Jesus, born in all things, BUT sin, became baptized to suffer for us. And in His sufferings, we are saved. We should give our sufferings up to Him who took on our sufferings to save us. Soon to be saint Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said that there is nothing

worse than wasted suffering. Suffering for God gives purpose. With our suffering for God, we become entwined in His suffering for us. We are truly living as He wants us to live. Not in suffering alone, but giving up our sufferings to Him. We accept the good things from God, right? Why not accept the bad? These become enrichments in our lives. They test our faith and strengthen it. Think of how lazy we would become if nothing made us suffer for a time. How disconnected we would become. Dare I say, maybe more distant from the Lord who gave of himself at the cross. Our little crosses in life can never match the cross of His, but we can offer all that we have, good, bad and all to Him who gave all for us. This week's Gospel shows us John the Baptist's reduction and Jesus growing in the start of his ministry, his purpose on Earth. "Thy will be done". Jesus said it. Doing God's will. John would go on to suffer as well in prison and beheading. He too would suffer for the Lord. We should do this as well. Maybe not the prison or beheading, but being a servant and suffering for the Lord. No one said being a Christian was easy. We will suffer. Persecutions, loss of family and friends, emotional pain as well as physical pain. Being human is to feel emotions, to live, both good and bad and that means to suffer from time to time. We can use that suffering for God. Then with that, we then appreciate the joy that awaits us in Heaven. Jesus felt all these too. His ministry starts today. And next week we will read about His ministry and witness the moment when the "rubber meets the road" so to speak, as he selects his disciples and speaks in his homeland. May we be worthy of His discipleship. Let us speak the words of the Responsorial Psalm we heard today, "**Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.**" May our sufferings echo John the Baptist when he says, "Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God." May God Bless you all.