

Homily022121

This past Thursday I came across a passage from a Dominican priest, a spiritual writer who died before I was ordained. The passage was about Taking up one's cross and following Jesus. The part of the passage that struck me was this:

*Our Lord, in the Gospels, is always talking about his HOUR, his crucifixion; he cannot be separated from it, for his Father wills it. We are disciples of a crucified Master, and so we have to be crucified with him. Our cross is usually given to us in installments, weighing differently at different times. It is made up of small cells, little fatigues and worries and things that go wrong. We have to try to put them together so that one day they will add up to a glorious cross, shaped like Christ's. We cannot see the proper shape yet partly because we are too close; in our self-pity we see each little bit magnified and distorted, and anyhow our loving Father will not let us see it as a whole yet, we would think it too big and heavy, and so lose courage. But we can carry our little crosses, little parts of the cross, and trust that in doing so we are becoming like our Master.*

I found that passage particularly helpful and insightful. In my mind it applies to my own life. All manner of things happen; and I, like you, find myself caught up in them. I must say it is rare in my experience that when I find myself in such a situation that I sense it is because the Lord wants me to be in this situation. But often He does. He wants me there. He wants you there. And He wants me there precisely because of His relationship with me or with you. Because if I wasn't in that situation, or you weren't in that situation, it would be more difficult for the Lord to be there. Or He desires the particular skill sets that you or I have, to be available to assist those in need. I have found, after I do my reflecting, that I am never in such situations alone. The Lord accompanies me into the situation. He is the silent companion on the journey. We are actually yoked together.

Usually I sense none of this at the time. It only becomes clear afterwards. In the moment, I am more aware of my lack, of being uncomfortable, or even afraid sometimes. There are times when He leads me into the dark, into the untamed, wild side of life in this world. Into the desert. It's not like He doesn't know or hasn't been there Himself. Today's gospel reminds us that the Spirit drove him into the darkness and wilderness. He was tempted to take the easy, popular way but He did not. He is described as being among the beasts He must resist. But they do not harm him. Nor, with his protection, will they harm us even though we too, often enough, are among the beasts. But the darkness is often the time of temptation, weakness and tiredness, and sin.

I have come to know and believe that there really is a daily spiritual warfare underway—still—in our world. The final victory has been won. Death has been conquered but there are still all these episodes where evil seeks to destroy and tear down. I am more alert now to the signs of what is going on and where the enemy still plies his trade. I have come to know my own weakness better too and what the triggers are that lead me to sin and how I must avoid them.

Our experience of this spiritual combat is rarely direct or really evident right in the moment. It is on the underside of things. It only becomes evident after some prayer and some reflection. We ask: What is happening? We ask: Why Lord? But we have to stay with the questions until the answers grow clear. The Lord does not appear to us, sit us down and have a heart to heart talk with us. He doesn't explain things to us. That's not his way. What He does do is invite us into a relationship of great care where he looks out for us and shows his love for us.

But then he expects us to remember. He expects us to be grateful. He expects us to understand that He will at times ask us to share in some of the sufferings he endured on our behalf. Sometimes He asks us to look at what he did and what he taught and how he acted. He asks us to look at what he asked of his disciples then. And then we have to apply what we have learned to our own lives now.

Sometimes there will be an intransigent person in our life. Jesus experienced that too. Sometimes there will be stupidity. Many around Jesus did not grasp who he was. There is deceit and calumny. Jesus had many people lie about him, what he did and what he said. There may be betrayal, even by those closest to us. Jesus too knew that. Weakness of character. False accusations. The list goes on. The Lord wants us to understand about this spiritual combat and that we really are embroiled in at times. He needs us to be mindful, to learn how to recognize what is really going on and to persist in our faith and trust in Him. It is as if the Lord asks of us what he asked of Peter, James and John on Holy Thursday night: Would you not watch with me one hour? Would you not stay and be with me in my sufferings? Can you not see me in your own sufferings? Do you not believe that I am with you in them, your faithful companion on your own journey?

I say often that there is much more going on in this life than we know. But the Lord invites us to his table each Sunday so we can be fed by his love and learn to cooperate with his grace—in all things.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.