My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Often it is not until a crisis that we truly discover where our real values lie. It’s truly amazing how our loved ones – or even our personal selfishness – can challenge the values we thought we had.

Ordinarily, we make decisions based on our values, everyday, as a matter of course. But every once in awhile we are challenged to our core because someone wants us to compromise these values. This will be for something that will be life-changing for them and soul-changing for us. A person’s son or their own very good friend wants, temporarily, to store a cache of illegal drugs in their garage – Another person’s daughter or niece asks to be driven to an abortion clinic in order to terminate a pregnancy – Our employee or boss is cheating and defrauding clients or customers and wants us to do the false record-keeping – and we will be fired if we don’t!

All of these challenges test our value system and our Christian discipleship – And none of them are resolved without pain and suffering on some level.

In the order of things and in the hierarchy of values, God must always be first and supreme. Not to keep God first is to commit the self-idolatrous sin of our primal parents. Jesus makes things very clear in the Gospel passage for today. He tells us that we cannot put parents, children, or, really, anyone or anything else before our love for him.

God loved us into life with His creative energy. Jesus, the Son, became one with us out of love, and was crucified so that we could live on a new, divine level. Jesus came to reveal the infinite love of God for us. But to remain in that love, we cannot do anything to separate ourselves from it.

And this is where pain enters the equation. Every disciple must carry a cross, suffer, and die in some way. It is the cross that God has asked us to carry. We cannot pick or choose another – we cannot turn away from it – without self-destruction and the loss of
our soul!

On the other hand, embracing the cross and carrying it will save our soul even though we lose our physical life in our struggle to carry it. This is the paradox and the mystery of Christian suffering!

Then, Jesus goes on to teach us how we must behave toward others – especially those whom God sends into our lives. We must listen to the prophets among us – especially those who challenge the culture and the status quo – We must encourage and welcome the good men and women who are unflinching in their integrity and commitment – And we must never withhold our kindness and generosity toward the little people – These are the ones shunned and rejected by the so-called “elite” or “better class”. Thus, the Shunammite woman welcomed and provided for Elisha in the Old Testament reading for today.

Finally, St. Paul reminds us that our Baptism is a baptism into the death of Christ. We can easily forget this in the usual way we celebrate this Sacrament today. We seldom baptize by immersion. We tend to focus on our cleansing from Original Sin and our incorporation into the Christian Community of the Church. Baptism opens us to the Resurrection and the Glorification of Jesus which we will share – But this is not possible without suffering and dying with him on our journey through this life!

Paul goes on to say that Jesus died to all that is sinful in the world – It follows, then, that we must die to all that is sinful in our lives. This means never allowing the love we have for family and friends to impede or jeopardize our love for God. Moreover, we cannot let our desire for profit, position, or acceptance keep us from truly doing the work of Jesus himself!

Brothers and Sisters, being a disciple is never easy. Facing the challenge of living is harder today than most of us can remember because of COVID-19. Nevertheless, God, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are always there for us. God’s amazing grace is always more than enough for all that life unleashes upon us.

So let us pray, today, for courage, perseverance, and steadfastness – May we remain faithful disciples of Jesus now and always into eternal life!

Amen.

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