

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 28, 2020

Here we are in our third month of the Covid-19 virus, and there seems to be an increase in the spreading throughout our state, in many states, and around the world. It doesn't seem this is going to end anytime soon. So we continue to wear our masks, keep our social distance, and wash our hands regularly, provide Mass online, and restrict the numbers of people we can have in church. These are ways of preventing the spreading of the virus. We continue to pray for an end of the virus, we continue to pray for an end to the social unrest, we continue to pray, Lord help us. As we pray I hope you know the Lord is with each of us. He promised that He will always be with us. He is true to His words, and the Lord says, I will be with you always, until the end of the world.

We know that it is not easy giving one's life to Jesus. If you have made a commitment to Jesus then you know how difficult and challenging it is to walk by faith and not by sight. Today's Gospel is a reminder for us that to follow Jesus is a life of self-denial. Jesus said, "*Whoever does not take up His cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.*" Jesus even said there can be no greater love in our lives, than God, if we are to follow Him. This is hard to understand at times, especially when it comes to family, but once you have given your life to Jesus,

then you learn what Jesus is talking about. You become freer to love others through God's love. This especially applies to our family. We know this, Jesus and the Cross go hand and hand. Therefore Jesus' disciples, that is you and me who are baptized, know that the cross and being a follower, go hand to hand. You cannot have one without the other. Jesus says you cannot be my follower if you do not carry your own cross.

Our society doesn't seem to understand this. The importance of sacrifice, denial, the whole message of the cross, to the world it is like speaking a foreign language. It is absurd to many. We live in this world of instant everything. It reminds me of that TV commercial, J G Wentworth, it is my money and I want it now. I know this is just a commercial for us to seek out this money lender organization, but we do realize now more than ever, the world is at our fingertips, with a touch of the button. In our homes, at the click of a mouse on the internet, we spend hours looking up information, checking out websites, emailing others, checking on whatever you want and whoever you want. Especially during this time of the Coronavirus, we have more time at home, more time to search on the internet.

Our brothers and sister who dealt with the pandemic in 1918 didn't have this technology or information at their fingertips, like we do. I wonder how they dealt

with it, or how the church addressed the issue: in some places, the diocese sent priest out to pray for the dead, and the grieving families that lost loved ones, the religious were sent to the hospitals to assist the doctors and nurses, the churches opened up their halls to house those who had no food, or lost their homes. The churches did the best they could to care for the families around them. Again, they were doing their best to survive. So are we, who some 100 years later, face another pandemic, but in ways that keep us better informed, and more hopeful for the future. Even though this COVID-19 carries a lot of unknowns.

They, like us, still had to search in faith and wonder where God is in the midst of the crisis. So how does Jesus fit in all of this: just like any tool or instrument it can be used for good or for bad, it can be used to help us grow closer to the Lord and others; or isolate ourselves even further from God and others. Even though we isolate ourselves now for safety's sake, the greater isolation would be the cause of sin, and choosing a life without God. This is a greater isolation than the one the virus is causing. In receiving Jesus, we stay close to God, and in turn, closer to ones we love, our family, and allow Jesus to share His love and grace with us, to help us love others. Without him, we cannot love like God, it is impossible.

But we do need to ask ourselves as followers of Jesus, is my life pleasing to Him at this moment? What are the areas of my life I need to grow to be a disciple of Jesus? Am I accepting the crosses in my life, like Jesus? Why do we run, from so much suffering and struggles to seek an easier way out? The grass may look greener on the other side, but we know that is a lie.

As faithful Christians, we must begin to mortify our self, which means to die to self, to our own desires and pleasures. We need to embrace our suffering, for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of our family, for the sake of our own soul, and the sake of others.

Not accepting our crosses means we cannot grow in virtue or holiness, because we continually run away from the very gift that will bring us closer to Jesus. To obtain spiritual progress, we need to begin to flex spiritual muscles, by not running from suffering, not giving into the easy way out. It will bring us greater peace and joy, which comes about by embracing suffering, and dying to our own will, desiring to do the will of God. In a way it is a Spiritual Cross – fit program. It is the same way the people exercise through crossfit, to encourage others to be physical fit. It applies spiritually as well. We need others to help us to be spiritually fit. Again which is more important? Spiritually, of course, because in

the end, no matter how fit or healthy, our bodies will turn back to the dust that they are made from, but our souls will live forever.

So to stay spiritually fit, and by use of the internet, Zoom, we will be offering a Spiritual fit program, called Unbound. It begins July 9, it starts at 7:00pm, and lasts eight weeks. You can check out our Facebook page, bulletin or email or call Susej for more information. There is also more information about Unbound, on heartofthefather.com. Like I said with a click of the button, wonderful information is at our fingertips to help us become more spiritually fit.

Just like Paul, reminded the Christians of Rome during his time, it is good for us to know and remember the words we heard today, *“If we have died with Christ, we believe we also shall live with Him”*.