

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last three Sundays, our Scripture readings called us to walk in faith, be men and women of hope, nurture a confident and trusting relationship with the Lord and cry out to him in our need, especially in our stormy, testing and trying times, and let that relationship become more gracious, generous, and compassionate. Today's Scripture readings call us to have courage to face the challenges, conflicts, struggles, and tensions that we may have to face if we choose to follow Jesus as his disciples. We are offered Ezekiel, the Psalmist, Paul, and Jesus as models of courage during times of inner conflicts as well as during times of oppositions and tensions in the world around us.

Ezekiel (first reading) was overcome with the burden of the message, with the pain of the rejection of his people, with the sins and obstinacy of his fellow exiles as he struggled to fulfill his mission. The Psalmist cried out for the mercy of God, bringing with him the bitterness and contempt he suffered in Babylon. Paul speaks of praying for the release of the "thorn in his flesh" and being assured that God's Grace was enough. Mark tells us that the attitudes of the people and their rejection made it impossible for Jesus to perform mighty deeds.

It is not difficult to recite a creed, but to live the Christian life is demanding and challenging and often difficult. Jesus challenges us to make difficult choices, make the difficult journey, walk the path of trials, face testing times and enter through the narrow door. The way to the kingdom is not easy, but it is just the right way, the way made to fit our needs! We must make difficult choices and be faithful to the choices we make. The choice is ours. Once the choice is made, the question is: is that your final choice? Your final answer to the call? For Ezekiel, Paul, and Jesus, it was their final answer to their call, as we see in the Scripture readings of today.

Jesus spoke about the cost of discipleship with startling honesty. Being a disciple could mean division, separation even from loved ones because loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the dearest loyalties of this world. To choose Christ could mean denial of other things and other loyalties! Jesus calls us to break out of our safe and comfortable zones into new and challenging lifestyle, a "cross-bearing" way of life! A cross-bearing way of life involves denial of self in the service of God.

Discipleship means dying to self so as to live for Christ. It means following his plan rather than our own agenda and obedience to His will and wisdom (Luke 14:25-33). It means trusting in the Grace of God, as Paul tells us in the second reading of today's mass. It means praying for the

mercy of God as the Psalmist does in the responsorial Psalm of today's mass. It means being steadfast even when our plans don't seem to be working well.

Today's Gospel reading (Mark 6:1-6) tells us that the attitudes of the people and their rejection made it impossible for Jesus to perform mighty deeds.....and Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. Jesus continues to challenge us to goodness, inspires us to service, teaches us to be forgiving, and calls us to work for justice and truth and peace and the total well-being of people. We can either dismiss him as "out of his mind", a "thorn in the flesh"; a "law breaker", an "idealist" or we can accept him and respond to his call faithfully, graciously, generously, joyfully and courageously. St. Francis de Sales advises us, "Go courageously to do whatever you are called to do."

Courage refers to the inner, the mental, moral, and spiritual strength that enables a person to face difficult, fearful, uncertain, dangerous or threatening situations. Courage means choosing to act even when feeling afraid... Persevering in the face of adversity... Letting go of the familiar and secure... Following the heart even when things are not working out as planned... Facing suffering with dignity... Standing up for what is right, etc. And that is what Ezekiel, the Psalmist, Paul, and Jesus did as described in the Scripture readings of today's mass. And that is what the Scripture readings of today call us to do.

The word "courage" comes from the Latin "cor" and French "Coeur", both meaning "heart." Words such as resoluteness and tenacity also describe the meaning of the word "Courage". It is the quality of a person to hang on to or hold on to who and what he is even when the odds are not in his favor. It involves standing firm in hope against all kinds of pressures, even pain, suffering and death. Let us strive to become courageous in doing all that we are called to do.

Courage is a matter of the heart, the gift of the Holy Spirit within us. It is this courage within us that holds us together, empowers us to stand our ground and keep rising when we fall. We must reach deep down and find that courage during these difficult, uncertain, and troublesome times. Fears and doubts about the future of our nation, the political and racial tensions, uncertainties about the upcoming elections, the war in the middle east, anxieties about the cost of living and many such realities threaten our peace and security. In the midst of it all, we must have courage to live lives of faith and move in hope and face whatever comes our way. Nothing is an obstacle to men and women of deep faith, courage and determination. Nothing is impossible for those who walk in faith, live in hope and are courageous and steadfast in doing what God has called them to do even when things are not working out as planned.

I encourage you to take a few quiet moments each day of this week to be still and reflect on how your day has been and pray for the grace of God to give you courage and strength to be faithful to God's call, especially during difficult and troublesome days.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 7, 2024

**Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned.
Holiness increases the capacity for conversion,
for repentance, for willingness to start again
and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness.
(Pope Benedict XVI)**

Collect

O God, who in the abasement of your Son
have raised up a fallen world,
fill your faithful with holy joy,
for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin
you bestow eternal gladness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

Forbearance is the discipline that helps us develop our spiritual muscles.

Ezekiel 2:2-5

Ezekiel, son of Buzi, served God as his prophet for twenty years during one of the most difficult periods in his people's history. He was among the first group of exiles who were forced out of their homeland into Babylon in 507 B.C.E. It was in exile that he heard God's call and he was overwhelmed by the message he had to deliver and so he did nothing for some time.... just sat seven days among the exiles that he was called to serve.

He was overcome with the burden of the message, with the pain of the rejection of his people, with the sins and obstinacy of his fellow exiles....he was moved by God's call, he was zealous for

his mission, he was filled with hope, he was saddened by his people's sinful ways, he was bitter, he was angry.....With all these, Ezekiel delivered God's message to God's people....hearts of people were, once again, turned to God.

Ezekiel became a real challenge and more than a challenge, "a thorn in the flesh" for his people, as Paul says (second reading)and his people became for him "a thorn" in his flesh! Ezekiel had a passion for God and God's ways....he had a passion for his people and their struggles.....he responded to both!

Psalm 123

Psalm 123 is one of the Psalms of Ascent (120-134), which are a collection of psalms sung by Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the three great feasts of the Jewish year (Deuteronomy 16:16). They may have been sung by the exiles on their return from Babylon. In any case, Psalm 123 epitomizes the spirit of an exile or pilgrim reaching his longed-for destination. He sings out what we are familiar with today: Kyrie Eleison...Lord have mercy...our eyes look to the Lord till he has mercy upon us! The pilgrim brings with him all the bitterness and contempt he suffered in Babylon (much like the returnees of war today). One aspect of any pilgrimage and all worship is this release that God gives the pilgrim or the worshiper from bitterness or guilt or shame and blesses him with peace.

**To you I lift up my eyes, who are enthroned in heaven,
As the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters.
As the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress,
So are our eyes on the Lord our God, till he has pity on us.**

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Something unclear, definitely undisclosed, a "thorn in the flesh" caused the apostle Paul great suffering.....scholars have given various interpretations to the "thorn" in the flesh. Whatever the suffering was, from this letter, we know that he prayed, repeatedly, to be free from the suffering.

The relief that he prayed for did not come.....only a promise came, "my grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness"an assurance of Grace to live and work with the thorn and not to be freed from it....a promise of strength to face the obstacles, endure the difficulties for the sake of the Gospel.

The "thorn" had to be acknowledged and embraced as a suffering to endure and as an opportunity to trust in God's Grace and to rely on God as the source of power and strength as a channel of God's Grace, a channel through which God's Grace is witnessed and revealed.

Mark 6:1-6

The presence of Jesus was a problem for his contemporaries. His life, his words, his message, his standards.....all of which challenged them and raised doubts and questions about their own way of life.....bothered their conscience! Jesus, in a sense, became a “thorn” in their flesh.

It was easier and more comfortable to dismiss Jesus as someone they knew well and someone who could not have anything worthwhile to offer them. It was easier to write him off as a familiar, young carpenter who couldn't possibly offer any new wisdom. However, some of them were scandalized by Jesus, others offended by him and still others felt judged by his wisdom. Mark tells us that his own family thought that he was out of his mind and came to take him home (Mk.3:21).

Mark tells us that the attitudes of the people and their rejection made it impossible for Jesus to perform mighty deeds.....and Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. Jesus continues to challenge us to goodness, inspires us to service, teaches us to be forgiving, and calls us to work for justice and truth and peace and the total well-being of people. We can either dismiss him as “out of his mind”, a “thorn in the flesh”; a “law breaker”, an “idealist” or we can accept him and respond to his call faithfully, graciously, generously, and courageously

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the day, July 7 - St. Willibald and 21 other saints are remembered this day.

Willibald was born in Wessex around the year 700. His mother, Saint Wuna of Wessex, was reportedly a sister of Saint Boniface. His father, Saint Richard the Pilgrim, was a chieftain of Wessex. At the age of three, Willibald suffered from a violent illness. His parents prayed to God, vowing to commit Willibald to a monastic life if he was to be spared. Willibald survived and at the age of five entered the Benedictine monastery at Waldheim and was educated by Abbot Egwald.

In 721 Willibald set out on a pilgrimage to Rome with his father and brother, Winibald. After departing by ship the group arrived in Rouen, France visiting shrines and spending much of their time in prayer. Eventually they arrived in Lucca, a city in northern Italy where Willibald's father became gravely ill and died. After burying their father Willibald and Winibald continued their journey, travelling through Italy until they reached Rome. They spent some time in Italy, strengthening in devotion and discipline, but soon the two brothers became ill with the Black Plague.

Willibald left Rome in 724 and continued his pilgrimage through Naples, Ephesus, Cyprus, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cana, Capharnaum, and Jerusalem and back to Naples approximately seven years after he had left Italy. Willibald and his remaining companion, Tidbercht, joined the Benedictine community at Monte Cassino. Here Willibald taught the community about his travels. He would spend over ten years at Monte Cassino and another local Benedictine monastery where he served roles as, "sacristan, dean, and porter.

In 738 Saint Boniface requested Pope Gregory III to send Willibald to assist him in his missions in Germany. The pope granted the request. Upon arriving at Eichstätt, Willibald was ordained a priest by Boniface on July 22, 741 and asked to begin missionary work in the area. In 742 he and his brother Winibald, founded the double monastery of Heidenheim. In 746 Boniface consecrated Willibald bishop of Eichstätt. Willibald served as the bishop of the region for over four decades, living in the monastery and entertaining visitors throughout Europe who would come to hear of his journey and monasticism. He died in 787 and was canonized in 938 by Pope Leo VII

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**The true and solid peace of nations consists
not in equality of arms, but in mutual trust alone.
(Pope John XXIII)**

