

Theme: "Strive to enter

by the narrow gate." **August 21, 2010**
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 66: 18-21

Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13

Luke 13: 22-30

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Peace of the Lord Jesus always be in your hearts!

Living the life of a True Christian has never been easy. It was never meant to be a walk through the garden of roses and the clouds of seventh heaven. Christianity was born out of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. While the passion and death of the Lord gave way to His glorious Resurrection from the dead, we can never forget the fact that His Redeeming Act began with some of the most violent and dreadful sufferings known to man. The persecution, tortures and deaths of Christians from the hands of the Jews and the Romans early in the history of the church has become almost the very seed that sprouted and blossomed into Christianity. The blood of the martyrs that watered the seed of the Christian Faith clearly draws our attention to the self-emptying demands of our Baptism into Christ and defined the militant character of our Catholic Faith. It has become the visible mark of the cross in every Christian life and the crown of faithful discipleship. *"He who perseveres till the end shall be saved"* the Lord Jesus said to His disciples before He died.

It is hard enough to commit and surrender our lives to God in Jesus, once we know Him and begin to love Him; but to live in a constant struggle to keep our faith, hope and love alive can be very difficult most of the time. Once we have decided to follow Jesus as the only way to the Father (**John 14:6**), once we entrust our lives to Him who alone promised to give us the joy that is complete (**John 16:24**), and once we start longing for the peace that He alone can give (**John 14:27**), we are often left wounded in despair by the side of the road wondering what it is really that God wants from us. And finally, even after we had clearly understood and known what God wants, we often discover that we are unable to comply with it for many different reasons.

Christian Life is filled with sharp thorns and rugged stones that can turn our lives upside down and leave us constantly struggling to drag our feet as we walk along. This is the narrow road in the gospel today that very few dare to take, but which leads to life. (**Matthew 7:13-14**) We all want the easy road to heaven but which does not take us there. The long and winding road to salvation often leaves us wondering when we would ever get there. Our thoughts take us racing back to His words of promise---"*Come to me all of you who find life burdensome, and I will give you rest. Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. My yoke is easy and my burden light.*" (**Mt. 11:28-30**) For a while these words give us comfort and strength. But then when we begin to stumble and fall with no strength to get up on our own, we yearn to see the end of the road and our hearts beat for the sooner fulfillment of those words that He spoke in John *"Do not let your hearts be troubled, in my Father's house there are many mansions. I shall go first to prepare a place for you and then I shall come back to take you with me so that where I am you also might be."* (**John 14: 1-3**)

Living fully the gospel means embracing the cross of sacrifice. Authentic Discipleship necessary involves the sign of the cross and its suffering for love of God. *"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."* (**Luke 14:27**) All this is meant for us to be stronger in our **faith**, in our **hope** and in our **love** for God and for others. St. Paul knew this by heart when he wrote to the Romans, *".....since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope."* (**Romans 5:1-3**)

We need a stronger **FAITH** to continue believing in God's love and mercy, in the beauty of life, in the sincerity of His promise, and the meaning of our Discipleship in Christ, despite all the hurts and the pains caused by so many obstacles on our way to holiness. The authenticity of our Faith and the purity of our intentions can only be put to the test when our vision of heaven starts to fade away with every stride and the presence of God begins to disappear from us. These experiences of darkness can only mean opportunities for growth and maturity in the pathway to God. Remember that the Lord will never give us burdens more than we can bear, and even when the weight seems to be unbearable, the Lord always puts His own strength underneath us so we never have to feel forsaken.

We need to hold on to our **HOPE**. The kingdom of heaven is worth all the hardships and pains that we go through as we draw closer to the object of our Love who is God. The kingdom of eternal peace and happiness, the kingdom of eternal justice and love is worth more than the sufferings of this world, said St. Paul. It is this hope that provides us the strong motivation to move on despite the difficulties we have to go through. This hope is what sustains us and cultivates our faithful endurance, constant perseverance and unwavering fidelity to Christ as we inch our way closer to the heart of God. This discipline of life characterizes the way for all Christians.

Patience and understanding are the true manifestations of **LOVE**. We will never know **HOW MUCH WE CAN LOVE** if we do not take it to the limits beyond our normal ability, capability, and strength. Even athletes need to take themselves beyond the limits of their usual endurance to become better at their special talents and gifts. And one of the evidence of this is when it begins to hurt. That is so with those who desire to have more love in their hearts to give. This is the only way to become perfect in the art of loving and forgiving. This is the real stuff that makes saints out of ordinary Christians and good Catholics out of the lapsed ones.