

The Cross

Homily for September 23, 2022

Friday 25th Week Ordinary Time

When Jesus asked, “Who do the crowds say that I am,” the disciples showed by their answers that the crowds saw something special in Jesus, but that their vision was limited. They weren’t able to see beyond what they were comfortable with or what they understood. They were unable to see Jesus’ absolute uniqueness. In contrast, Peter recognized Jesus as “The Christ of God.” He spoke out in faith. We can sometimes find it difficult to follow Peter’s example and speak up when others challenge our faith. Nevertheless, each of us is called to “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

Jesus never gave the disciples room to imagine their lives would include power or prestige. He repeatedly reminded them that his life would include rejection and suffering and he taught them to expect the same. He said, “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first” (John 15:18) and “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The Catechism acknowledges that this is challenging: “Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it” (CCC 164). But Hebrews encourages us: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:2).

In his homily for the canonization of St. Padre Pio, St. John Paul II said, “The life and mission of Padre Pio prove that difficulties and sorrows, if accepted out of love, are transformed into a privileged way of holiness, which opens onto the horizons of a greater good, known only to the Lord” (Sunday, June 16, 2002). Later, in the same homily, he stated, “Is it not, precisely, the ‘glory of the cross’ that shines above all in Padre Pio? ...In God’s plan, the cross constitutes the true instrument of salvation for the whole of humanity and the way offered by the Lord to those who wish to follow him” and then quotes St. Padre Pio, “In order to succeed in reaching our ultimate end we must follow the divine Head, who does not wish to lead the chosen soul on any way other than the one he followed; by that, I say, of abnegation and the cross” (Epistolario II, p. 155). We draw comfort from these words as we carry our daily crosses, knowing that Our Lord has planned to draw a “greater good” from our suffering.

Today, by God’s grace, when we make the sign of the cross, let us do so reverently and thoughtfully, giving thanks for Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and asking for the grace to embrace the crosses and suffering of our own lives with deeper faith and trust.

My Lord, my God, my Savior, my Refuge, I want to embrace all it is that you allow into my life as your instrument of salvation. I want to remember your cross as a sign of your love. Lord, help me grow in my trust in you and remember the words of the prayer of St. Padre Pio: “O Lord, we ask for a boundless confidence and trust in your Divine Mercy, and the courage to accept the crosses and sufferings which bring immense goodness to our souls and that of your Church...”