

Thinking as God Does!

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Mt 16:21-27

Ave Maria Catholic Church. Sunday, September 3, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

Peter rebukes Jesus: “God forbid, Lord!”

These words of Peter describe the feelings of every human being faced with suffering: Lord, take away this disease! Lord, remove this shame! Lord, release me from this pain! We fear suffering, and naturally, we reject suffering. By nature, we want to enjoy peace, physical and spiritual health; in a few words, we all look for happiness. However, suffering is a part of our existence. Everyone suffers. No one can avoid passing through it, whether we want it or not.

Suffering entered into the world at the very moment that sin touched our lives. At that precise moment when Adam and Eve rejected God, suffering became present in their lives and in the lives of their future offspring.

But God, in his wisdom, can and wants to turn the bitterness of suffering into the medicine of life. Like a bitter medicine that is difficult to swallow but, once taken, brings relief and health, God offers us the medicine of suffering – that suffering that frightens us – for our spiritual health.

That is why Jesus tells Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” Peter only feels the pain. He cannot see anything beyond that.

The question is, “Why?” Why is “suffering” the medicine of life?

St John Paul II says that “in order to perceive the true answer to the ‘why’ of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists.”

God is Love, and this is how God thinks: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,”* (John 3:16).

According to this truth, God gives his Son to “the world” to free humanity from evil, which bears the experience of suffering within itself. Suffering entered the world because of our sin, but God takes the bitterness of suffering and makes suffering an instrument of salvation through His love.

God’s thinking measures things perfectly. And this is what we often really miss. God knows perfectly the terrible evil of sin, something terrible that has brought all other evils into the world: Without sin, there wouldn’t be wars in the world, without sin there wouldn’t be floods, earthquakes, or natural disasters, without sin, there wouldn’t be death, and even worse, eternal separation from God. However, we do not seem to pay much attention to the grave malice of sin.

God’s thinking measures things perfectly, and in his perfect knowledge, God establishes that **without sacrifice, there is no redemption.** Sin is an act of pride. In the act of sin, a principle is

established: “I will not obey God, I have my own laws because I know better than anyone else” (and in this anyone even God is included!).

Since pride is the origin of sin, the true medicine is humility. Humility opens the door to right thinking. This is God’s thinking. There was a very grave evil in the history of humanity – that evil is the act of sin, rebellion against God; then, God established a most wonderful and mysterious remedy – the passion and death of our Lord Jesus. Jesus humbled himself, and Jesus suffered for us.

Without sacrifice, there is no redemption. Sacrifice is suffering made sacred. Sacrifice comes from the Latin words SACRUM + FACERE, that is, to make something sacred. In this case, we make sacred the action of suffering. Redemption does not come with suffering alone. We must make our suffering sacred by offering it as an act of worship. This act of worship is rooted in an act of love towards God. When suffering is accepted with love, then it becomes a sacrifice or an act of worship acceptable to God.

Now we understand why Jesus tells Peter (and He also tells us): *“Deny yourself, take your cross daily, and follow me.”*

Deny yourself.

It is hard to hear, but at the same time, it is completely true. If we want to be closer to God and be truly blessed, we must deny in ourselves everything that does not belong to God. Now, what is really in us that is completely “ours”? Properly speaking they are our faults, our sins. They are completely ours because we accept them and make them part of ourselves, and they do not belong to God in any way whatsoever. Then, when we deny all these things in ourselves, we discover what belongs to God: all the beauty, truth, and goodness of God in our lives.

Take your Cross daily.

Jesus invites us to “take up our daily cross” with care, love, compassion, and devotion. He tells us that the cross is not an instrument of torture, no! It is an instrument of salvation. Like the surgical knife in the hands of the surgeon. It seems to be an instrument of pain, but in his hands, it becomes an instrument of salvation. The cross is the instrument that God uses to heal us. This is what Saint Paul understands when he says: “The only thing I can boast about is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And Follow Jesus. He says: “Follow me.”

Suffering is repulsive to us. It is naturally repulsive. Jesus knows what we are, and he knows what we fear. For this reason, his invitation is very appealing. It is an invitation to come after Him. Yes, the cross is there, but Jesus is there too. As a friend, as a brother, he tells us: *“Take my yoke, take my cross, I carried it first.”* That’s what love does. Love makes light the heaviest things. Love makes our crosses lighter.

Let us welcome the medicine that our Divine Physician offers us. He does not want to harm us; He wants our good and our salvation. Let us offer our daily crosses through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus, then what seems to be “only” pain will become the instrument of salvation. Amen.