

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT – CYCLE B

In today's gospel Christ says: Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.

I thought today I would give this quotation by Jesus a new twist.

There is a vast difference between living with what we need and wanting what we don't need. Needing what is necessary and not desiring the non-essentials, the luxuries. The gospel and Christ speak about dying to oneself, but I want to speak about: life, happiness, living and joy.

What ideas, words, concepts, can you identify with in your life style? Splintered, scattered, fragmented, stressed out, overworked, not loved or appreciated, or...can you identify with positive words like: joyful, fulfilled, peaceful and satisfied.

The average portrait of an American can be summed up with this statistic: An average American has 40 hours of leisure time a week, and the average American spends 6 hours a week shopping and only 40 minutes playing with the children.

"Baby Boomers", 1 out of 3 say they would accept a smaller pay check in exchange for a simpler life style.

What makes people happy? Researchers say that these activities create happiness. Note: All are very simple activities:

Making love, that is sharing love, feeling love for another person, drinking wine, eating chocolate, watching T.V., having a cup of tea or coffee.

In the late 1990's it seemed that people were searching for contentment, happiness. In their quest, searching for meaning, these were their priorities/values:

1. Good health; 2. A strong faith; 3. Love and 4. (I added this one): family

In the 1950's Bishop Sheen was the first prominent T.V. preacher and evangelist. But Bishop Sheen's once a week half hour program did not always stress joy and success. Bishop Sheen preached the cross, carrying your crosses.

Christianity helps us to carry our crosses, but Christianity does not shield any of us from crosses, stress, illness, failure, sorrow, divorce and death! Rather than praying for smaller crosses, we should pray for broader shoulders.

Where did we ever get the false idea that if I'm a good practicing Catholic or Christian, "Nothing bad is going to happen to me or my family?"

Next week is Palm Sunday, and the beginning of Holy Week....

A vivid reminder that Christ Suffered:

1. A friend betrayed him
2. Other friends abandoned him and denied they knew him.
3. He was blasphemed and slandered.
4. He was condemned to death unjustly.
5. He died as a common criminal.
6. He was placed in a borrowed grave/tomb.

If Jesus Christ who was innocent, suffered so many injustices, why would we believe that we should be immune, exempt from any suffering?

If you were to ask God in your sufferings the question, why, I hope that Jesus Christ would reply, why not.

There is no one here present that can give me a sacred scripture quote stating: If you live a good Christian life, you will be automatically free from crosses.

But.....most of us can give a sacred scripture quote stating: If you live a good Christian life on earth, you will be assured of eternal happiness!

In all of Jesus Christ's parables, he never ended by saying: and they lived happily ever after!

But Christ did say in today's gospel:

1. The person who loves his life loses it, and the person who loses his life for Jesus Christ preserves it to eternal life.
2. The seed must fall to the ground and die in order to live.
3. If anyone will not take up his cross and follow me, he is unworthy of me. He also says: "Come to me all who are burdened" (Matthew 11:28). So prayer and confession can be like a spiritual shower.

Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical entitled, "The Christian meaning of human suffering", mentions when someone asks why he or she is suffering the person suffering should ask the question to Christ who has suffered!

My crucifixion and Christ's crucifixion: Christ died physically so that I might live spiritually. I would have furiously fought against having railroad spikes driven and piercing both my hands and feet. I know that I could not undergo that terrific suffering!

During the next two weeks, make the way of the Cross or try to be present for Holy Week Services, and maybe you will find an answer to your suffering in Christ's sufferings.