

Third Sunday of Easter 2020

Up at the head table in the cafeteria, one of the nuns had placed a big bowl of bright red, fresh, juicy apples. Beside the bowl, she placed a note which read, "Take only one. Remember, Jesus is watching." At the other end of the table was a bowl full of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, still warm from the oven. Beside the bowl was a little note scrawled in a child's handwriting which read, "Take all you want. Jesus is watching the apples!"

These two disciples **gave up on Christ** because of the **cross**.

- They were **walking away from** the community of apostles and Christ's followers - **leaving the Church**.
- It wasn't because they were **big sinners**.
- It was just that the **Cross**, the tragedy of Good Friday, had **scared** them away.
- "**We were hoping** that he would be the one to redeem Israel," they say to the stranger as they walk back to their old lifestyles, sad and disappointed.
- They simply **can't understand** how salvation can come out of the **Cross**, victory out of defeat.
- So they **give up**.

But Jesus comes to their **rescue**. He walks along with them, **talking** to them about the Scriptures, the promises and revelations found in God's Word.

- And their hearts "**burn within them**."
- Their **hope** is stirred into flame.
- Their **spiritual strength** and their **faith** return.
- Suddenly they are able to **recognize** Christ's saving power and love even in the **darkness** of the shadow of the Cross.

We **too** face the temptation of fear and discouragement when crosses come into our lives.

- In fact, we all know Catholics who have **left the Church**, just as these two disciples were leaving Jerusalem, because the Cross **crushed** their hope, and they became **cynical, angry**.
- What will prevent **us** from abandoning our Lord and our hope when we feel the weight of the Cross?

- The same thing that **rescued** these two sad disciples: conversation with Christ - **prayer**.

Prayer is the source of light and strength for the Christian.

When we take time to **unburden our minds** to the Lord, and to **read and reflect** on the Scriptures, maybe with the help of spiritual books, we **give Jesus a chance** to explain things to our hearts.

Centuries ago, when our fellow Christians were building the **astonishing Gothic Cathedrals** of Europe, the **whole town or city** would contribute to the work.

Sometimes they would do so **directly**.

- They would quarry the stone from somewhere outside the city, and **every towns person** would put **their own stones** onto carts.
- Some of the carts and wagons became so **heavy** that they would require **hundreds of people** to pull them to the building site.
- Yes, the **people themselves** would pull those carts.
- They would **harness themselves** to the carts with ropes, or just **grab onto ropes** attached to the carts full of stone for the rising cathedral.
- And all together they would **pull the cart along**.
- Sometimes they would **sing hymns** as they pulled.
- Most of the time they would pull in **silence**, each one **praying to the Lord** in the quiet of their heart,
- **thinking about** how much Christ had **sacrificed** himself on the cross to be able to offer them salvation,
- and **offering** him prayers and their **own sacrifice** in **thanksgiving**, and in **penance** for their sins.
- They had no **iPod's, MP3's or phones** to listen to as they worked, and no **pay check** to look forward to.
- What gave them the strength to carry on that **backbreaking** work, week after week, month after month, decade after decade?
- It was **prayer**. They pulled those carts **loaded** with stone, and **while** they **pulled**, they **prayed**.

We too are pulling our carts through life, **loaded** with the stones of **suffering, frustration, hardship and more because of this pandemic**.

And if we become men and women of **prayer**, we will **not only** find the **strength** to keep on pulling, but the Holy Spirit, the master architect, will even build those **stones of suffering** into **beautiful cathedrals**, glorifying God and filling hearts with joy for all eternity.

Being men and women of prayer is **not** the same thing as simply **saying** prayers.

- It is always a temptation for us to **reduce** prayer to just reciting prayers.
- But prayer is meant to be much **more** than just reciting empty formulas.
- Prayer is a **relationship**, it's an **ongoing conversation** with Christ our Lord, in which we talk about what's important to **us** and what's important to **him**, just like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.
- The Catechism actually **defines** prayer as that relationship.
- It tells us: "Christian prayer is a **covenant relationship** between God and man in Christ... a **vital and personal relationship** with the living and true God" (2564, 2558).

Because it is a relationship, we can **always grow** in our prayer lives.

Jesus wants to **pour** into **our** hearts **his own** strength and light, wisdom and endurance, patience and joy.

When we **grow** in our prayer life, we give him a chance to **do** that.

And the only way to really grow in our prayer life is to **spend more time in prayer**.

Every Christian, every one of us, should spend **ten or fifteen minutes a day**, preferably in the morning, in **personal prayer**.

Reading a passage from the Bible, **reflecting** on it, and **responding** to it in our own words, in the quiet of our hearts.

Read, reflect, respond. This is a **simple formula** to help **jumpstart** our prayer lives.

Let's **not wait** till tomorrow. Let's **begin right now**, in **conversation** with the Lord who loves us and wants to come to our rescue, especially during this pandemic.