

March 18, 2018 – 5th Sunday of Lent

Yesterday was the most important day in the calendar of the Church year, according to me, Saint Patrick's Day. There are some myths associated with Saint Patrick's Day. I'm only going to talk about two because it's my job to teach the truth. It's also my job to make sure when I know things I don't like; I tell you about them. But anyway. First, the traditional color of Ireland and Saint Patrick is not green, it's blue. Yes, it's blue. Secondly, corn beef and cabbage, besides being a waste of a perfectly good brisket that should be smoked and grilled not boiled..., is not traditional Irish food. In Ireland, they had pork and potatoes. So if you have bacon and hash browns, it's Irish. Where did they get this corn beef and cabbage stuff? Well, when the Irish came to America, in New York City, they couldn't really find pigs and if they did, it was high priced. So, they went down to the Jewish deli and they found corn beef and cabbage. It was cheaper, they liked it, so they adopted it as the dish that they liked. So we have that tradition coming to this country but it's not Irish, it's Jewish. Which I guess would mean it's Catholic too because we are former Jews. That's right. So if you like your brisket boiled, God bless you. Those of us who have spent time in Texas realize, that's not how you're supposed to prepare it.

During His public ministry, Jesus made it clear that one condition for being His follower was bearing the cross. "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine," He said, "Let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me." As His passion draws near in Holy Week, He energetically reiterates this statement, in today's gospel. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains just a grain of wheat and does not bear fruit of any kind." To be a Christian is to be where Christ is. Where is Christ? "Whoever serves me and where I am, there will my servant be." Service. When we serve each other, we are where Christ is. He is always pouring out His life for us, for others, especially when He is on the cross. That's where He pours out Himself the most, in self-forgetful love. What do we call that? Agape. This is the lesson of the gospels and of the Eucharist. The extension of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. That's why we say, "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." It represents in a different way, that Calvary is still going on, because God is eternal. It won't end because Christ is still dying for our sins. Whatever happens with God, continues until the end of time. That's why we should give our life to God and our neighbors. Christ's commandment was, to love others as He has loved us. He taught this lesson on the cross. He laid down His life for a friend. He said there is no greater love, than to do this. He made you and I, friends, at the last supper, equals, then He laid down His life on the cross.

Saint Paul, if you read his letters, some of them are difficult, he has learned this lesson well. To follow the cross, in his life. He was flogged several times, stoned and left for dead several times, shipwrecked several times, etc., and yet, he still kept coming because he knew that the cross was the way to eternal life. He wrote to the Corinthians, "The only knowledge I claim to have was about Jesus and about Him as crucified Christ or crucified Savior." As followers of Christ, we expect or should expect, crosses, difficulties, and even at times persecution. To be a true Christian means, not just having a crucifix around your neck, or on your rear view mirror, or in your home. The crucifix must be embodied in the very core of our being. And yet we do, it's just that we have to show it. All Christians, all Catholics, have this on their soul.

We are sealed and stamped with the sign of Christ in two sacraments that we receive. Baptism and confirmation and for some, ordination. The Church uses three kinds of oils in its' ministry. We have oil of

the catechumens. This is olive oil, a natural substance, that is blessed and is used on the chest or the throat, whatever we can get to, of the baby or the adult being baptized. We have another one, the oil of the infirmed. It is used for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick or if you get it for the last time, it's called last rites. Both of these are olive oil, both of these are blessed. I can bless them, any priest can bless them, we usually let the bishop bless those at Holy Week. The third kind, holy chrism. It's olive oil with a special oil added to it so it smells good and you can tell the difference. This oil is consecrated and can only be consecrated by a bishop during holy week, at the Chrism Mass. This oil, we use for confirmation, baptism and holy orders. This oil leaves a mark on our soul. Even if we reject Christ, even if we go like the Jehovah Witnesses, the marks are still on our soul. We die, we end up in heaven, we can look at each other and we can say, "Hey, you were baptized, you were confirmed, you were ordained." We go to hell; the demons can see that too, and it won't go well for those who have been made a person of Christ and rejected Him. The demons will take it out on you worse than the other people down there. It's interesting that in some of the saints' lives, they have been given the gift of seeing souls, they can see these marks. They can also see when you've been to confession and what sins you haven't confessed. You hope you don't run into those kinds of saints. The other thing too, is if somebody is great in the demonic, if they are way up high or way down low in Satan in the satanic religions, they can see it too, and they don't like what they see. Even if I'm not dressed as a priest, I can tell by the look on someone's face, if they worship Satan and they can see what's on my soul, because they know who I am. The hatred on their face. So, these signs are put on our very soul whether we accept them or not.

In ancient Rome, the soldiers of the Empire, had a tattoo put on their shoulder to mark them for the emperor. If you watch Gladiator with Russell Crow, this is the mark he tried to scrape off so that he didn't belong to the emperor anymore. It was a sign of identity and mission. Roman soldiers, even after their time was finished, had certain rights and privileges. Just like retired military in our country. When they retired, they had a special lead seal they carried on their chest on a necklace. This seal said, "I fought for the emperor and I belong to him still." They still had rights and privileges associated with that. They could travel around the empire and get freebees and discounts that nobody else could.

When we are baptized we have that mark placed on our soul. He became our Lord, our Protector, our Savior, snatching us away from Satan's grasp. When the bishop made the sign of the cross on our forehead, with the sacred chrism at confirmation, we were sealed as Christ's soldiers, with all the privileges and responsibilities that entails. Whether or not you believe in Jesus, we still have crosses to carry. Life in a fallen world is full of crosses, no matter what. No one is an exception when it comes to suffering and struggling in this life. But, as Catholics, we find meaning in these crosses, it's called redemptive suffering. Joining it with Christ on the cross, so that it has redemptive value. Redemptive value means something that gets us redeemed and saved, so we go to heaven. The trick is remembering that Christ carries it with us. The cross that Christ was nailed on wasn't really His cross. He never sinned; never had a selfish thought or performed an evil act. That cross was our sins, that He atoned for. Ones we haven't committed yet even. That atonement will keep going on until the end of time. Those are our sins He died for on that cross. Jesus says we are never alone. "I am with you always." In the midst of our joys, Christ is at our side. In the midst of our crosses, Jesus is there. The cross only becomes unbearable and suffering, when we forget this. How can we remember all the time that Jesus is there? We must become a people of prayer, constant prayer. Prayer must become as important to us as breathing. As breathing. It's hard, it's difficult, but it's the same thing as trying to get up to speed to run a marathon.

You have to internalize it, you have to visualize it, you have to do it. Yoda says, "There is no try, just do." Just do it. Start doing it because otherwise, it won't happen. There is no other way. If we are a prayerful person, that means we are in touch with God, all the time. That means we realize Christ is right there with us, helping us carry the cross. Just think if He wasn't; how crushed we would become. We might as well just kill ourselves if Jesus wasn't helping us with the cross. The Eucharist is about to come to us in a deeper way. And when He does, let us pray as the Greeks did when they went to Philip. "Father, we would like to see Jesus so that we never have to carry our crosses alone again."

God bless you.