

Homily for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I remember when I was a child, my parents made my brother and sister and I do chores. For example, I had to either wash or dry the dishes – no dishwasher back then! I had to wash out the cat’s litter box once a week. And, I had to make my bed each day. It’s not that my parents were lazy, and so that’s why they had us doing the work – they were actually hard workers. And it’s not that they were task masters – although I wondered that sometimes. It’s just part of being part of a family – everyone has something to do to help the family function well. And the reason they had us do these chores is that they wanted us to learn responsibility and a good work ethic. This is important. The responsibilities they gave us flowed from their love for us. Because they wanted to shape and mold us so that we could one day become mature adults, they made us do things we’d rather not have to do.

Well, something very similar is true when it comes to our relationship with God, our heavenly Father. In today’s second reading, St. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: “Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you were baptized into Christ.” In fact, when we were baptized, whether as infants or as adults, we were born again. Up until that point, we had experienced natural birth from our mothers. But, when we came to the font of baptism, we were reborn again as children of God our Father through the ministry of the Church, which is our mother. Then we were baptized into Christ, who is the only-begotten Son of the Father, and we became adopted sons and daughters of God through faith. So truly, as Christians, we are now members of God’s family.

And similar to how our parents mold and shape us as children so that we will become mature adults, so too does our heavenly Father do with us. And the Son of God shows us what this means throughout His earthly life. In today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus tells His disciples and us, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

What does it mean to take up our cross? Well, what is a cross? A cross is something that is imposed on us that we need to deal with. It's not something that we can avoid or shun. Suffering, illness, trials, distress, problems, the struggles of daily life – all of these are crosses that we each have to bear in different ways. Many times when it comes to our crosses, we would rather not bear them. And so we try to find ways out, or ways to tweak and finagle things to make it easier. But actually, the way forward is to surrender to God those challenging or difficult circumstances that come with our crosses.

Just as Jesus reminded His disciples that He must suffer greatly, so must we realize that suffering is a part of our lives. Jesus did not dodge the suffering that was His. Rather, He let His Father be His strength and refuge through it all. Similarly, when we are carrying our crosses, it is an invitation to turn to God and surrender all our expectations and preferences, and instead ask Him for the grace, the strength, and the peace we need. And just as our parents used chores to teach us personal responsibility and other lessons, so too must we remember that God wants to use our crosses to teach us real dependence on Him.

God is our refuge and our strength. And it is faith that He wants to give us to see these crosses, not as obstacles, but as opportunities; and, not as scourges, but as means of being molded into the mature Christians that our Father desires us to be. Sometimes it might feel like we are truly losing our lives, or a part of ourselves, when we carry our crosses. But, the truth of the matter is that God is actually stripping away the old self, so that we can more fully be prepared for eternal life in His household in heaven. After all, we are truly His sons and daughters. God bless you.