

Ordinary 20C

The school year is soon approaching and some of our young adults are going off to college, others are moving up to the High School for the first time, or Middle School – or maybe even starting Elementary School. It is going to take a lot of hard work to finish the school year successfully

It's the same with every aspect of our lives – Enjoying success, conquering a goal, accepting the challenge – we sacrifice time and energy to get it done

It demands accepting temporary setbacks while remaining true to our goal.

Young couples I have married look so perfect on the wedding day –

Yet they are going to have to accept challenges and sacrifice and commitment if they really want a happy marriage.

All the happily married couples here in our parish know that marriage has made them better Individuals – it's a personal challenge with sacrifice rooted in love for their partner.

Looking at today's readings it is clear how grounded in reality our faith is.

Our faith is not afraid to talk about both happiness and sadness.

It is not afraid to speak about both virtue and vice.

It tells us if we attempt to love God without loving one another it's a sham – artificial faith.

Faith encourages us to base all relationships on respect, particularly marriage.

Faith tells us to understand the meaning of the word sacrifice for our faith to be relevant.

Catholicism is fundamentally grounded in reality.

So today we read about Jeremiah the prophet having a bad day

Jeremiah speaks truth to power – a prophet in the King's court with an unpopular message REPENT

He refused to butter up the King with what the King wanted to hear but stood up for the truth

He was mocked, ridiculed, and today – thrown into a cistern – a dry well with only mud at the bottom

He would have died except the King listens to his advisor and pulls him out.

Persecution of Jeremiah was something all prophets determined to stand up for God's Word, what is right, and good, and true no matter what others say or do to them.

Grounded in reality our faith tells us that it is also difficult for us to stand for what is right and true

If we do – we too face ridicule, persecution and mockery

Yet we have to meet those challenges of life and overcome the barriers to the truth put in our way

This is what Jesus did – He stood for the truth and was put to death. But He did not compromise the Word of the Father.

If this meant denouncing leaders of the Temple, he would do so.

If this meant criticizing his closest followers, he would do so.

If this meant journeying to Jerusalem where He knew He would die, he would do so.

In this context we can understand this hard teaching in today's Gospel.

The strife and struggle that the Lord's presence in the world brings Christians comes from Christians accepting the challenges of living a Christian life

Consider the young people in our parish who will be in Middle School and High School this year.

Those that refuse to go along with drinking and drugs – who refuse to wear their skirts that short or their pants that tight or refuse to let others take advantage of them physically - - will be given some nasty label.

Life would be so much easier to go along – but being rooted in the Lord demands they be in a minority.

Consider the parents of our parish. They will be criticized this school year for setting moral standards within their homes. Their own children will tell them that they need to get real and allow them to go along with what everyone else's parents allow.

Many parents of our parish will have to put up a terrible struggle to stand for what is right and true in their own homes, with their own children.

But living for the Lord is worth the struggle

Consider our senior citizens. Their challenge to follow Christ means trusting in Him as their bodies and the bodies of their friends begin to fail. For so many of our seniors their challenge means being a caregiver when they themselves are exhausted. Every day presents a new challenge for seniors to trust and hope in the Lord when life is getting harder and harder. But this challenge can draw them closer to the Lord.

Every day I hear of new challenges that confront a parishioner or a family. This family is dealing with emotional problems, that family is dealing with financial problems, that one is having marital problems, this one has physical disabilities. All of these challenges, these daily crises we all face, all lead us to God if we embrace them with selflessness, with faith, with trust in God and with love. HANG IN THERE.

The readings today are clear and grounded in reality. Life is full of challenges and struggles. The greatest of these is rooted in our standing up for what is right and true, standing up for God.

Each challenge met – each crisis overcome – forms each of us into a more complete loving people.

Hebrews concludes with “Do not grow despondent and abandon the struggle” with that said remember the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew “know that I am with you always”.