

# Fr. Canisius' Reflection for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Dear Parishioners,

The earliest followers of Christ were scattered, disciples were being murdered and buried, and skepticism of the Jesus movement reigned in ancient Israel. Nevertheless, there was great joy in the midst of these first Christians. *Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the good news and strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."* Certainly, the Christian life is one of paradox. This message reveals the reality of human suffering and acknowledges that hardships are a part of discipleship. Being Christian is not a "free pass" from suffering, but rather being Christian is suffering *with* Christ and his Church.

As twenty-first century Christians, it can be easy to fall into the trap of believing that following Jesus makes everything easy or our lives better. Yet Jesus speaks of a very different kind of Gospel, one attested to by the lives of the earliest Christians in today's first reading. This is not a gospel of prosperity, but instead one of inevitable suffering: blessed are the poor, the meek, the mourners, the persecuted. In the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, it is the last who shall be first.

Sometimes the suffering in our lives and those around us can feel unbearable. Where is God amidst such hardship, and where is the Christian joy that we are called to have? Yet, like the earliest Christians, we cling to Jesus' promise in the face of suffering: everything will be raised up on the last day. As we read the Acts of the Apostles in this Easter season, we see how the Holy Spirit gave powerful life and renewal to the early Church. He also brought love and unity to the assembly of believers.

So, where is God? Where is the joy our hearts desire? God is everywhere, but God *especially* is in our suffering, bearing our hardships and weeping alongside us. We need only look to Jesus on the cross to see this. But any glance at the cross must be accompanied by an even longer gaze at the empty tomb, for it is Christ's resurrection that allows us to trust his promise that nothing shall be lost, all shall be raised. Herein lies the paradox of our Christian faith: that life could come from death, that hope, and joy are possible even in the midst of pain. That is the real Gospel, the good news that we cling to.

Following Jesus requires a farsighted plan. It calls for short-term pain for long-term gain — heaven. We heard this in our first reading from Acts today, which says we must *undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God*. The Christian life, amidst all its suffering, involves paradoxical joy. Together we can support one another.

Thank you for your continued support of St. Charles Borromeo Parish. I am glad you are here!

Have a blessed week!

*Fr. Canisius*