



*But with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself.  
-concluding prayer of the divine Mercy Chaplet*



## **The Cost of Discipleship: Suffering as Jesus Does**

**A reflection on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent**

Heroes and martyrs have things in common. On the one hand, national heroes are respected for how they offered their life for the country. They sacrificed their life for the country's welfare and good. Martyrs, on the other hand, are recognized by the Church for they are models for believers on how to live out their faith. They sacrificed their life for their faith.

Today's Gospel of the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent tells about the coming of the hour of Jesus. His impending death is an act of self-donation or self-offering. In a way, the gospel reading explains the paschal mystery of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Let us try to reflect on the important points found in the gospel passage.

First, Jesus gives us the image of the "**grain of wheat**" to describe his coming death. ( "**... unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.**" ) If we are familiar with farm life, we can easily understand what Jesus meant. There is a contradiction here: a grain has to fall or die in order to produce fruits. A grain, when it falls to the ground, ends its being a grain and is transformed into a new life. Jesus now foresees that his impending death would mean life for his followers. His death is an act of self-offering par excellence. It can never be a useless and meaningless death because it brings salvation and eternal life to believers. Thus, he has to die so that we may live. His death means our life.

Second, he gives another contradiction: hate one's life in order to preserve it. He says, "**Whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life**". We

can think of some people who were able to live this out. St Francis Xavier, for one, left or abandoned a glamorous life in the university, and instead, became a missionary. Likewise, we heard about the life of Albert Schweitzer, who abandoned a lucrative career in music and instead, he works as a missionary doctor in Africa. There are many more inspiring stories of people on how they fought against the values of the world, and instead embrace the values of the kingdom. By doing so, they are able to preserve themselves "*for eternal life*".

Third, Jesus emphasizes the need for discipleship or following him. He says, "**Whoever serves me must follow me**". We hear of stories about servants who have followed their masters. Wherever their masters go, they follow them. When their masters transfer to another country, they are brought by their masters to that place. Loyalty and fidelity have become the characteristic of this relationship. Indeed, we are servants of the Lord. But Christ expects more than that. It is necessary for us to follow him. Following him would mean following in his self-offering.

Let us reflect further on the self-offering of Jesus which is a mark of suffering. In the first part of the gospel passage, we heard that some Greeks came to Philip and asked him that they would like to see Jesus. It is also about time for us to see Jesus, especially in his suffering. His is a redemptive suffering. He suffered for our sake; he offered his life for our salvation.

Suffering is not alien to us. Almost every day we can experience suffering. We suffer from relationships, and we also suffer from illness. But suffering without Christ is senseless and meaningless. It is good that we take the opportunity to find the meaning of our own suffering. It can be a graced moment if we see it as our participation in the suffering of Christ on the cross.

