**“We Must Die to Self in Order to Enter the Kingdom of Heaven”**

All our readings today point us to the phrase, ***“We Must Die to Self in Order to Enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”*** Dying to self means surrendering our will so we can fully follow the will of God. It means giving up worldly pleasures, and instead take up what God desire’s for us. It means letting our spirit overcome our flesh and putting on the armor of God. It means, loving God with our whole mind, heart and strength. It is by self-denial that we daily carry our cross.

When we surrender our will to God, it is then that we accept His unconditional love for us. It is like opening His door of mercy that He had prepared for us before the beginning of time. Then our hearts would be full of peace and happiness that the world cannot give. We will then be able to enter into His joy for eternity. JOY which stands for Jesus, Others, and You.

In our first reading, Prophet Jeremiah in expressing his lamentation, was at the same time full of admiration and adoration of God. He lamented about his suffering at the hands of those God sent him to preach His word to. He felt abandoned by God. In saying that God had duped him, and that he allowed himself to be duped, Jeremiah let us know that he did God’s will. He gave up his own will in order to carry out what God commanded him to say.

Prophet Jeremiah emptied himself so that God could fill him. He found it too compelling to obey God’s command. However, the Holy Spirit that was in him, drove him to preach the Gospel of God though he tried to resist. Because of the life Israel was living at the time, a life that involved worshiping idols and sexual immorality, He felt all he had to preach was about doom and glum. God had told him earlier in his ministry that he would have to preach what He told him to preach. So Jeremiah felt he had no choice.

In Jeremiah, despite his closeness to God, we find that because of our self-gratifying desires, which fights against God’s spiritual desire for us, conflicting desires goes on within us. We want to do what we want to do instead of doing what God had put in our hearts to do. However, the closer we are to God, the easier it would be for us to do His will. In order words, the closer we are to God, the more grace we would get from Him so we will be able to do His will.

Paul in his letter to the Romans, continued on the same theme of surrendering our will to the will of God. He told us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Not only as a living sacrifice but a holy sacrifice. To do these, first we have to emptying ourselves of earthly desires, comforts, and what we prefer so we can do the will of God. Our sacrifice becomes holy when we unit them with the once and for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

So when we offer our fleshly desires in terms of suffering, with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, our suffering would become holy. Christ is the one who makes our sacrifice holy. It is during Mass that our sacrifice is most efficacious if we unit them with Christ’s suffering. Especially at the time the priest is representing the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus back to His Father in heaven. What God’s will for us is that we obey His commandments so, we can have the fullness of joy in His presence. Paul want us to understand that conforming ourselves to this age would only lead us astray and away from God.

He said by transforming our minds to what God’s want us to do, we will know the will of God. It is when we do what is good and pleasing to God that our minds would be transformed and we would need nothing else but God. All things that are worldly, would be like rubbish to us. Should we be tempted by them, by the grace of God, our minds would cast them away. Instead, His love would give us so much joy and happiness.

In our Gospel reading, immediately after Peter’s inspired confession that we heard last week, when Peter proclaimed Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus let His disciples know about His ultimate mission. He let them know about His desire to do the will of His Father. Jesus let them know about the cross that He was eager to carry for our salvation. The cross of His passion and death on the cross.

Peter reacted probably in the same way all of us would have reacted. We, would want nothing bad or we would not want those we love to suffer. Jesus rebuked Peter and told His disciples that suffering is part of His mission, just as it is part of our lives. Jesus wants us to imitate Him by laying an example for us about suffering. Peter would have none of that! He did not want his beloved Teacher to suffer. He wanted to protect Him.

However, Peter missed one crucial point that Jesus said. Jesus said at the end of His proclamation that He would be raised on the third day! All Peter could think about was the suffering and not the glory that comes after the suffering. The glory that is for our salvation. We too are destined for glory at our resurrection.

Dying to self is carrying our cross. All of us have our own cross, though they might be different. Whatever tribulation or trial we might be facing in our own lives, or difficulties we would love to get rid of but we cannot change because they are beyond our control, these are what we are to recognize as our cross. It is like the serenity prayer, ***“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.”***

When we embrace hardship with trusting confidence bearing in mind that we are saved only by God’s grace, we would have emptied ourselves and let God fill us up. It is then the Holy Spirit would be fully active in us. When all is said and done, with better understanding and spiritual maturity, we might even thank God for our cross. Knowing that God would always bring greater good out of our difficulties.

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Him for the grace to carry our cross trusting in Him.