

22th Sunday- A 2011
Deacon Pat Hall

Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/082811.cfm>

You Christians are nuts!

You follow a God who dupes you, tells you what to do only to be mocked and laughed at. Then you are asked to make a sacrifice of yourself—sounds like that hurts to me. Then you're told to deny yourself and pick up your cross—again what about "hurt" don't you understand? And... "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it"?? What sense does that make?

Well, even though I try to make sense of it, most importantly, I am called to live it. As a Christian, that is through the cross.

Within the year we will have an artist's depiction of the cross fill the upper part of our north wall. That work of art is to find its inspiration from our Good Friday *Tre Ore* services held from noon to three, the hours Jesus hung upon the cross. During our services we erect a large 7-foot tall cross at the edge of the sanctuary. While the reader proclaims prayerful reflections, parishioners young and old, come up to touch the cross, to kneel at it, to hold it, to gaze upon it. People come up in groups of 3 to 7, as however they are prompted, to join in leaning against and embracing the cross. It is incongruous to see the tender love, sometimes tearful love, of what the rest of the world sees as an instrument of death. Part of our answer to making sense of all of this can be found in that communal scene.

A few years ago, I went to a conference with the rest of the pastoral team and listened to the keynote speaker, Fr. Tony Gittins. One of the things I will forever remember him saying had to do with this very subject.

He spoke about how we evangelize. We offer hospitality. We try to make it easy to come to church. We provide transportation, food, stimulating music and profound preaching. This is all as it should be, but it falls short of the mark.

What people are really looking for is that one thing that is ultimately important, that thing which will make them feel alive in a world that assaults their fears and anxiety daily. They are looking to fill that hole in their gut with which we are all born. They are looking for real life.

Fr. Tony says that you will never truly live until you find that for which it is worth dying. You will never truly live until you find that for which it is worth dying.

We had a funeral here yesterday for one of our long time parishioners. I listened to the family's stories of his joyful sacrifice as he and his wife raised 8 kids with limited finances. He gave his all for his wife and children and in return he found great life, a full life.

In basketball they talk about "leaving it all on the court", that every effort that could have been given was given. That's how he lived his life. He wasn't living his life for his sake. He was living it for their sake.

While the family was filled with the grief of his passing, there was also humor and love, appreciation and indebtedness for the love he shared.

What's even more wonderful about his story, is that that life...that love that he shared... he gets to take with him to the other side. He found life here... that he can take there.

I might not be able to take my possessions with me, but I can take the loving living sacrifice I offer here into eternity to share with the holy loving one, who withheld nothing from me, not even his death on the cross.

Death does not have any sting for those who have found that Jesus' sacrifice has given them a life that will never end. It is because Jesus' death is always to be understood in light of his resurrection, his Easter, his life-giving life.

So why all that nonsense that I first accused you of being nuts for embracing? It is for nothing else than to be truly alive...with each other...for each other...for our God...and for ever.

Have you found that for which it is worth dying? I would like to give you a minute of silent time, so that Jesus can share himself with you... in preparation for when you come to the altar and share yourself with Jesus and each other.