

4th Wednesday | 2021

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15

Brothers and sisters:

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

You have also forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:

My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, he scourges every son he acknowledges.

Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as his sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?

At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

See to it that no one be deprived of the grace of God, that no bitter root spring up and cause trouble, through which many may become defiled.

Psalm 103:1-2, 13-14, 17-18a

*Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.*

*As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him,
For he knows how we are formed;
he remembers that we are dust.*

*But the kindness of the LORD is from eternity to eternity toward those who fear him,
And his justice toward children's children among those who keep his covenant.*

Mark 6:1-6

Jesus departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples.

When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished.

They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"

And they took offense at him.

*Jesus said to them,
"A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house."*

So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them.

He was amazed at their lack of faith.



Blood, Sweat and Tears

That is how willing we are for something important, really important. It seems though that for most of our lives we follow the business model of obtaining the highest Return on Investment. We evaluate a good deal by how good something is for how cheap we can get it.

That is not Blood, Sweat and Tears. The idea of blood, sweat and tears is giving an all-out effort, an all-in investment, of what ever one has to do for what has to be done. There is a sense of desperation in it. It is worth the sacrificing of one's own blood, strength and sorrow. It is life and death.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews understands this. It is as true for individuals as it is true for communities.

*Brothers and sisters:
In your struggle against sin
you have not yet resisted to
the point of shedding blood.*

Jesus, through his passion, death and resurrection, made paradise possible for humankind. We are created for eternal love. We reject it through sin. We are powerless to win it back.

For Jesus loved us so much that he withheld nothing from us, not even his death on the cross. Jesus is the way... and he is also our example. He is our example for love at its truest: sacrificial love.



When God reveals that He is love, love is not an adjective or a description. God isn't love-like. In the eternal relationship of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit their love, their very personal selves are given in a unified act of creation. That is sacrificial love.

That is the example for you and me. That is the example for our community.

I pray that a crucifixion is not waiting for me, but I *am* called to carry His cross. I *am* called to endure the suffering that this broken world offers as a return for sharing God's love.

While Jesus paid the price of sin for us, I still continue to sin. You continue to sin. We continue to sin as a community on an institutional, national and international level.

In our concupiscence, we seek our security through power, position and possessions. Our world has been beset by this throughout history. Our progress through technology has offered us so much to combat the effects of evil and yet it seems to more often accelerate the centrifugal forces of disintegration.

Tough times have come and tougher times are coming. How am I, how are you, how are we as a community to follow Jesus' Way? Even when we strive our best, we err and go off track.

I remember the assurances of my friend and mentor, Fr. Ken Schmidt, who told us that the Bible is the history of God's relentless love pursuit of us.

The Father gave his only begotten for us. Jesus said he would be with us always and through him was sent God's Holy Spirit to animate us with his sacrificial love.

God respects our free will. However, his fatherly love does not allow us to get lost without correction so that we can regain our way.

do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reprovved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, he scourges every son he acknowledges.

At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

Make straight paths for your feet

Discipline
Reproved
Scourges
Pain

This does not sound like a promising marketing plan: “Hey, join my cult!”

But suffering has been acknowledged throughout the Bible in Old Testament times and New. All of us have had to contend with the interior conflict of how to reconcile suffering and death in a world created by a loving God. The theological term for this is Theodicy. Much has been written about it, but nothing has completely resolved the mystery.

I was steeped in the loving tradition that God is our consoler and healer in a world of suffering. And yet our passage from Hebrews says our loving Father disciplines us, reproveth us and scourges us. We may find it more painful than joyous. Our Father does so out of love and for our ultimate good.

I am left with an uneasy tension: Does God afflict us?

I had to deal with that as a father to my own children. For that full story, click [here](#).

I am no stranger to spanking. My parents used it judiciously and sparingly in raising us and I had no compunction against using it as I was raising my youngsters when I felt it was needed. As time continued, I started having problems with its effectiveness. My two oldest boys were 3 & 4 and constantly in each other's face, especially at bedtime. I would administer swats to break it up and quiet them down for bedtime. It was decreasingly effective and my frustrations increased as did the power of the swats. I wanted them to know this was serious and I was serious. I was involved in ineffective parenting at the least, and at the worst...?

I did some research. What happens in spanking is that children are imprinted with the message that violence is acceptable as long as the person delivering the violence is convinced of their righteous position.

That is not how we wanted to raise our children. In my research, I found an effective method of physical discipline that is not violent. It leaves the child corrected... and loved. Again, for that full story, click [here](#).

There's a very odd thing about God and how he created us. As creatures of the clay, he gave us the faculties to discern the secrets of our environment, of physics and chemistry. As creatures made in his own divine image, he gave us the hunger to want to understand his mystery. Yet this is something beyond our capabilities, not only as individuals, but as a collective people across the globe and across time.

I still work in the tension of resolving God's revelation in our Letter to the Hebrews with my embrace of a God who does not afflict. May I offer some consolation from the Second Letter to the Corinthians (v.3-7):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow.

If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement.

There is one thing I do know and cling to: God is love. (1 John 4:8)

