

Readings: [Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

I like a good cold... said no one ever! I've been battling cold for the past week... I was home-bound one of those days... and as it often happens with great saints who at one point of their life are either bed-bound or imprisoned, they often come to have deep insights as to the stages of the spiritual life through that experience. Well, I am no saint, but I did reflect deeply on the stages of a cold...

Stage 1: Denial... it began on Saturday last week. By the end of the 6:30pm mass I told Lupita... I feel strange.... it's that stage when you can sense something is off but not sure why, so you just blame it on busy day, perhaps not getting enough sleep the night before, so you brush it off as nothing and go to bed.

Stage 2: Pain... you wake up the next day and you might as well have swallowed lava! The throat burns, it hurts to swallow... breathing dries up the throat which makes you want to swallow more often which just means more pain and misery.

Stage 3: Drowsiness. Suddenly you get the urge to sneeze, you feel your head get flushed and hot, and out of nowhere, a waterfall magically appears in your sinuses. That happened to me during daily mass on Wednesday evening. For the first time I was glad I was wearing a mask... didn't have to use my sleeves, just squeeze right on to the mask... (No worries I washed it!)

Stage 4: Misery. This is when the body aches and fatigue kicks in. You lay down and the thought that comes to mind is: this is it, now I know how I am going to die... a common cold!

Stage 5: Anger. Who was it! Who gave it to me! And then you start going through the memory archives of the last week; people you meet, hands you shook, trying to find the culprit.

Stage 6: Acceptance. You know it is eventually going to be fine as symptoms slowly begin to ease... and after all the inevitable pain and suffering, your immune system will be strengthened.

(By the way, side note, I love how during the week I kept getting secret home remedies... which by the way are all basically the same! It's "get some hot water, squeeze a lemon, maybe a little ginger, add honey, and... a shot of alcohol!" One person said whiskey. Another recommended bourbon. Still, someone else; tequila. I really didn't know which one to use, so I just mixed all three... Did it work? I don't know, all I know is I've been sleeping really good these last few of days...)

I'm sharing these stages as an analogy to speak about the stages of the Christian life that Jesus has been laying out for us for the last few Sundays. By now we have heard him repeat the same thing in various ways: if you want to be my disciple, then:

Stage 1: Follow me... be willing to recognize the Law, the Word of God, the foundation of the commandments, in me.

Stage 2: Seek treasures in heaven... be willing to find fulfillment in God alone and not in the security that comes with material things (those repeated criticism against the rich)

Stage 3: Recognize, NOT the elephant, but **the child in the room.**

Repeatedly he has put children in the middle of his lessons which have been an example for humility and vulnerability... meaning being willing to be inconvenienced for others.

Stage 4: Service... seek a life of service, not of power, and if you are to have any power, it is to be used for the sake of the service not for the sake of who is the greatest.

And then there is stage 5, which is also something he has been repeating over and over but has been greatly ignored until now... even I have ignored it in our time of reflection...

Stage 5: You need to be willing to suffer.

Jesus has been letting this oversight go, until now. The disciples have been excited about doing all the other stuff. They all saw that what Jesus was doing was good. They saw how people's hopes were being restored through healings, through conversions of heart, through hearing the word of God, all good things so yes, they wanted to be a part of it. But anytime Jesus told them about the stage of suffering, it went over their heads... and instead just wanted to focus on the end goal, creating that glorious Kingdom, wondering what place they would have in it, who would be the greatest.

But ignoring suffering does have deep consequences, and this is what Jesus is helping us understand today through James and John.

James and John had good intentions. The question about sitting on his right and left is itself a good desire, I myself pray every day that I may sit at God's presence now and in the age to come, that in itself is a

good desire, a good goal... but there was a major misunderstanding as to what that meant.

Yet Jesus had been clear, he was not trying to trick or fool them. He told them that Kingdom of God is to be established through the **cup** and **baptism**, two important images that they should have known meant *suffering*. Not to mention the prophets were clear about it too, they talk about the *suffering servant* time and time again. Jesus explained that the Kingdom of God, the goal, will be revealed when the Son of Man who came to serve is **lifted up**, and in being lifted up, we will all see in the horrific scene of the cross a suffering God... meaning, that glory lies in the fact that God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son so that we may have life.

However, all they kept hearing is **kingdom** – uuuh, yes, social security!. **Power** - uuuh, yeah, being the decision makers. **Cup** – oh, a nice chalice bedecked in gold fit for a king, yes please I would like to drink out of it! **Baptism** – well that’s kind of new, as Jews we don’t have the concept of a baptism, we have circumcision, but Baptism sounds a lot better, definitely less painful, sounds like a cool and important ritual... if that is what will make me be part of your team then yes, of course, yes, I am in, yes, please grant that we may sit at your right and on your left.

They envisioned what we would all envision, a throne with Jesus as king in the middle and two prominent chairs at the sides... yet what Jesus was describing was a very different throne, where the throne is not made of expensive marble, but of a dirty hill on the outskirts of town filled with trash and skulls, Golgotha... where the prominent spots are

NOT chairs, but crosses, one at his right, the other at his left, just like the one he would be **lifted up on**, hung on. “**Are you sure this is what you want?**” He asks...

You see, Jesus is not trying to scare them away, he was happy to hear them say that they wanted to be a part of it, but he wanted to make sure they understood what they were asking... otherwise, if they said yes without knowing, upon seeing what it actually required, upon seeing the suffering of Jesus that they too would have to share, **they would have ran**, and they would have left Jesus hanging alone on the cross.

Spoiler alert, that is exactly what happens... Mark's gospel emphasizes how *everyone* ends up either denying him, yelling “crucify him” along with the crowd, or turning a blind eye as soon as they arrested him, as soon as they came face to face with suffering. Everyone runs away from suffering, and let him die.

Suffering will be a part of our life whether we like it or not, at some point, in some way, and when we face that reality, we all have the same inclination to run away. Yet, Jesus is asking of us, stage 5, pick up your cross and follow me, follow me to Calvary, don't ignore my suffering or someone else's, or your own, otherwise if we pretend it is not there, try to go around it or deny it, someone is bound to get hurt, someone innocent is bound to left alone hanging on the cross like me... that will either be you, or the person next to you.

If I am not willing to enter into the suffering of someone else, if I just want to shoot for the goal, glory my own entrance into glory, then I will become indifferent and not be moved to make sure no one has to face that humiliation, that level of hate, that level of suffering.

The Christian concept of suffering is not just some spiritual ideal, it comes down to how we treat each other every day. Think about what are the areas of suffering that I am tempted to run away from in my life?

Societal example: the relationship between an employer and employees... an employer needs to be willing to suffer, to sacrifice their own desire for worldly riches so that their employees all get a fair wage and safe working environment and are not being used for one's own gain. It means being in touch with the difficulties of those under your authority so as to be serve them with your own position.

As a parent, you must be willing to suffer for the sake of your kids if I am to be a good parent. A parent must be willing to be a slave, to sacrifice it all for their children, otherwise they are neglected, and today, many are neglected.

As a student, if I want to achieve something in my life, get good grades, a good job, then I need to be willing to put in the work, to suffer through those hard classes. Otherwise, if I run away from suffering, I won't care if I cheat or not, if I do my homework or not, if I need to study instead of being on my phone or not... it involves every aspect of our lives.

What Jesus is asking of James and John is what Jesus asks of us in our lives... to not ignore the reality of suffering, not in us, not in others... that when we ourselves are faced with it, to embrace it, because that is how the power of love of God, which conquers all things, is made manifest. We will all experience the cross, and whatever happens to least of these, is happening to Christ. Jesus is asking: please, do not let anyone, do not let me, suffer on the cross alone. -Fr. Carlos