

## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Let me read for you the words we address to God in the collect for today:

*May Thy grace, we beseech Thee, O Lord, ever go before us and follow us: and make us continually intent upon good works.*

May Thy grace make us continually intent upon good works.

My brethren, among all the good works we can perform, there is one that surpasses all the others. One that we don't hear about, and yet it is the most necessary for our salvation.

And this is what I intend to speak about today: about the most important good work that we can accomplish.

Some days ago, on September 17<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated the feast of the impression of the stigmata on Saint Francis of Assisi. This great Saint received, in his own body, the 5 wounds of Jesus crucified: in his hands, in his feet, in his side.

And on September 20<sup>th</sup>, we commemorated the anniversary of the impression of the Stigmata on another Saint, a faithful son of Saint Francis, Padre Pio.

The stigmata were, for Saint Francis and for Padre Pio, an occasion to unite themselves even more with the Lord in a very special way. To unite themselves with the Lord in His sufferings. To suffer with Christ for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

So they received the Stigmata to suffer...

And, my brethren, this is what I intend to speak about, the most important good work we can perform: to know how to suffer for the love of God.

Very often, for us, the word “suffering” carries only a negative meaning. We don’t want to hear about it. We don’t want to have anything to do with it.

And yet, the saints were always able to see, with the eyes of Faith, the two sides of suffering: not only the painful things we have to go through, but also, and most importantly, the purpose of it all, its meaning.

To suffer without a purpose is hell, but to suffer with a good purpose is Fortitude. To know how to suffer for God is martyrdom, and to know how to suffer for the good of others is true charity.

In this way, suffering can become not only something we tolerate, but something we may even desire, not for the negative aspect it has, but for all the positive things it can bring.

You see, many saints suffered and laid their lives for the faith, willfully, out of their love for God. Many saints risked their lives in order to help others...willfully. How many of them died because they were serving the sick and they got sick themselves.

But even nowadays, when we think about religious life and all the sacrifices it imposes, worldly people may ask: how can someone willfully choose a life of poverty, of chastity, of obedience?

My brethren, these choices are not unreasonable or crazy, but they are motivated by love; their purpose, their meaning, their only explanation is love, charity.

So we can better understand why the saints were thirsty for sufferings, because in fact they were full of love. And as fire needs wood to keep itself alive, so love needs suffering, love lives of sacrifice. A love that is not proved by suffering cannot be called real love. Suffering comes to test love and see if it is true or not.

Let me tell you a story: One day, a man was praying and he had a vision of Christ. He saw the Lord crucified, crowned with thorns and bleeding. So, out of compassion, he tried to remove the crown of thorns from the head of the Lord. But the Lord told him: Don't try to remove my crown of thorns, because it was a gift from my Father. If you really love me, put on your own crown of thorns and unite yourself with me, in my sufferings.

If you love me, unite yourself with me, in my sufferings.

These were the words of Christ.

I know that for the world, for those who live in the flesh, for those who do not belong to Christ I am speaking nonsense. I know it. But for those who have the Spirit of the Lord, they know I am speaking Truth.

They know that, because of the sufferings of Christ, our sufferings can become like gold, valuable in the eyes of God, if we suffer with Christ, for His love and in union with Him.

So we may say our prayers, we may help some people, but if we are not willing to carry the crosses we have in our life, we are missing the mark.

And in fact this is how we prove our love for God: in our capacity to suffer, to make sacrifices for him. Any other path besides the way of the Cross is an illusion, my brethren. Any other path is an illusion.

Doing penance, doing good works is always a good thing. But we have to remember the fundamental truth that the most important penance we have to do, the first good work to perform is to carry our cross, the actual cross that I have in my life. Maybe it is not the cross I wanted, maybe it is not the cross I like. Yet it is my cross. My cross to carry.

Let us say, you have a family: carry on the cross of the duties of your state in life.

Your spouse makes you suffer: carry on the cross and be yourself a good spouse, for the love of God.

Someone is rude to you, uncharitable, makes false assumptions, rash judgments and speak about you to others: don't try to be even and pay evil with evil, never. But be charitable with this person, and you will be carrying the cross, and you will be sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Maybe you suffer from poverty or loneliness: unite yourself with the Lord, carrying your cross, bearing your sufferings with Him, one day at a time.

Maybe you suffer from some pain or sickness? So learn to offer these sufferings as a sacrifice to God: Receive Lord, my pain, receive all my sufferings...

You see. It is simpler than we would think. We don't need to have the stigmata to accomplish the greatest of all good works, no. We just need to be willing to suffer, all the things we may have to suffer, with love for God, in union with Christ.

Suffering has no value in itself. But the value of suffering comes from the love we have. So we have to learn how to suffer well, not to waste any of our sufferings anymore.

If we suffer with love, we can transform our sufferings into gold, very valuable in the eyes of God.

And that great cross we have can become, in fact, the greatest source of richness we have in our lives.

(...)

This is the science of the Saints. This is Christianity pure and undiluted.

My brethren, you were given today the secret of holiness.

So I ask you to reaffirm your intention to carry your cross, to bear your sufferings, your difficulties with love for God, in union with Christ.

So don't be afraid to suffer. Don't be afraid of the Cross.

Because it is in through the Cross, on the cross, that we are saved. Amen.