

Called to be Christ-Like!

I just returned from attending the Fall Retreat of the priests of the Archdiocese of Washington. It was a great experience. We were a total of 21 priests serving 21 different parishes. We were blessed to have an excellent Retreat Master, Fr. Brett Brannen, Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church in Savannah, Georgia. His earlier experience as Vocations Director and then as Vice Rector of Mount St. Mary Seminary were invaluable. He had chosen a quotation from the Rite of Ordination to the Priesthood as the retreat title: "**May God, who has begun this good work in you, bring it to fulfillment!**"

Throughout the retreat, Fr. Brannen used many insightful quotes from some of the greatest saints. I want to focus and expand on only a few of them in the hope that they can help you to reflect and get closer to Our Lord Jesus Christ. The first one that comes to my mind comes from St. John Paul II, "**The only success recognized by God is Christ-Likeness.**" Our society is obsessed with success such as being on the high school football or track team, being accepted by a renowned school or college, graduating with honors, making much money owning a business or through a good, stable salary, being elected as a politician, etc. All these successes make us feel proud, yet they all are worldly successes, not spiritual successes. This is why St. John Paul II reminds us that the only success recognized by God is **Christ-Likeness!**

What does it mean **to be Christ-like?** St. Paul encourages us to be **imitators of Christ**. When facing a difficult situation and debating what to do, many of us then ask the question: **WWJD? What would Jesus do?** This is a good approach that reminds us to imitate Christ when facing difficult challenges. We know some of the great human qualities displayed by Jesus as Man: Loving Trust in God the Father, total surrender to God the Father, unconditional love of everyone, having a merciful and forgiving heart, priority to those most in need (especially those on the margins of society), deep silent prayer to the Father having given his life on the Cross for the salvation of all sinners ...and many more virtues, including the three Theological virtues of **Faith, Hope and Love!**

How does one **become Christ-like?** In Mark's Gospel proclaimed two Sundays ago (Mark 8: 27-35), right after Peter proclaims, "**Jesus, you are the Christ!**", Jesus teaches the disciples "...that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected...and be killed, and rise after three days", and then shows all of us the **Way of Discipleship**: "**Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.**" This is a powerful request to all of us. This is the best way to become "Christ-like." Denying ourselves means that we consider that we are **nothing** compared to God. This is **humility**: **HOLY SPIRIT** empty my heart from my own self and fill it with Christ, so that one day, I can say with St. Paul, ... "*it is no longer I who live in me, but CHRIST.*" This is the total union with Christ. This Union implies self-sacrifice/suffering through the carrying of our **cross**. This is the mystery of the Christian Cross!

Fr. Brenner gave us a good insight into this paradox of the Cross. He bluntly stated that there are **two things that Christ promised: The Cross and Peace**. This may appear as an oversimplification of all the promises Christ made us. However, it is helpful in guiding us how to be Christ-like (the only success that matters to God). For Fr. Brenner, **the peace of Christ is nothing more than the ability to carry our crosses well**. In other words, Christ Himself is the one who helps us carry our cross well, but we need to invite **Him** to do so and not get in **His** way by trying to impose our own will. St. John Vianney gives all of us much hope: "If you carry your cross well, it will carry you **all the way to heaven!**" This is the paradox of the Christian Cross: to be Christ-like, God invites us to accept the suffering of carrying our crosses, and He sends us His Son Jesus to help us carry them well, without complaining, and with **love** and **peace**. Accepting such suffering for our Love of Christ will allow us to find **peace** now on earth. It will carry us all the way to **heaven**, that **eternal peace with God**, where there will be no more sufferings. When we accept our sufferings, our crosses, we become less self-centered and have compassion for those around us who suffer too. To be Christ-like is to see Christ in the faces of everyone we encounter. This is especially true for those in most need, helping them carry their crosses. **Mary**, who was standing at the foot of the **cross** on Good Friday, can also help us in carrying our crosses. Our on-going **consecration to Jesus through Mary** helps us to become Christ-Like as we are inspired to imitate her virtues, which in turn lead us to imitate Christ Himself. Think about this when we renew our **consecration** to Jesus through Mary **this Sunday afternoon, October 7**. That day we welcome Bishop Dorsonville to our parish on the Feast Day of Our Lady of the **Rosary** and will venerate the **International Pilgrim Statue of Fatima**.

Come Holy Spirit, living in Mary - Help us open our hearts to Christ's Peace so that we can carry our daily **cross!** Come Holy Spirit, living in Mary - Help us carry the crosses of those around us; family members, co-workers, and friends! Come Holy Spirit, living in Mary - Help us **consecrate** ourselves to Jesus through Mary! Come Holy Spirit - Help us to be **CHRIST-LIKE!**

May God keep pouring His blessings on each one of us!

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain