

Homily for August 21, 2016

By Deacon Mick Irving

We as parents truly want the best for our children and we know that to ensure they grow in good character and responsibility they absolutely need discipline lest they become spoiled. It is therefore important to help our children lovingly embrace discipline—well, good luck with that! Even adults don't embrace it! Still, discipline is important--because it ultimately produces the fruits of righteousness and holiness--and that is what the second reading was about:

*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."*

So, what is discipline? The dictionary defines discipline as an action to:

*...bring to a state of order and obedience
by training; and to punish or penalize
in order to train; to correct; to chastise.*

So, discipline is part of life, and must always be done with love.

About 20 years ago, one of my sons said that he wanted to purchase a certain kind of music. Like most of you, being a loving parent and wanting the best for my child, I told him that generally this music contains a lot of foul words and often glamorizes disrespect and violence towards women and others. I told my son that there was an old saying: "Garbage in, garbage out." My son responded: "Oh, come on now Papa, everyone is listening to it and it has a good beat, and it isn't entirely bad. I said, "Okay, tell you what- you just made yourself a very large bowl of Cheerios and milk-(and those of you who have teenagers know what a very large bowl means!) At any rate, I asked my son if we could do a little experiment that might help him see why I didn't want him to listen to this music. He agreed, so I asked him to go into the kitchen,

take one of our kids' old baby spoons, proceed to the dog kennel in our back yard, scoop a tiny bit of the "dirt", and dip the spoon into his cereal just once. My son frowned and said, "YUCK! I wouldn't be able to eat THAT!" It would ruin my breakfast. I said, "Oh, come on now, that wouldn't make the cereal entirely bad!" Well, he belly laughed and I made my fatherly point. A point based on love! Divine discipline is always inspired by Divine love.

God's intention is to purify us-to make us more like His Son. How does He do it? Through fire! Remember the reading from last week – Jesus wants to set fire to the earth. This is the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit. And, fire does what? It burns. How does a silversmith purify silver? He purifies it using fire. When does the silversmith know the silver has reached purity? He knows it when he can see his own reflection in the liquid silver, like in a mirror. The impurities that muddied the silver are burned away. God does the same for us. He purifies us but does not let the fire totally consume us. He withdraws us from the purifying fire when He sees His reflection in us or when he sees the results He wants.

Many of us don't really understand that discipline can involve pain and suffering. So, we have to work on trust, just as children have to. Remember that upset look your kids gave you when you took them in for their first shot (when they were old enough to remember)? They didn't understand why you didn't protect them. It is important to come to grips with this concept—this mystery. Remember the Scripture passage from Hebrews:

He "Jesus" learned obedience through what He suffered.

Does God ever will an evil action? No-but He allows the consequences of evil actions to discipline us. God established an order to things. If I jump off a building because I want to do my thing, and I disregard God's order, namely His law of gravity, I will injure myself or die. If I don't die, I will hopefully learn from the experience. So, it follows that if I embark on a path

contrary to God's will, there is a consequence to that action. Consequences are a form of discipline and often involve pain and suffering.

Well, what about Our Blessed Mother? She never sinned. What consequence does she have to endure? Why did she have to suffer that night flight into Egypt where idolatry was rampant to escape a murderous king bent on killing her Son. Why did she have to suffer the horror of seeing her bloodied and beaten Son on His way to Calvary or her Son's brutal execution on the Cross; or her bitter sorrow when she received Jesus's dead body, torn from deep wounds and covered in blood. To what purpose is it God's "will" that this Immaculate Heart suffer so?

If He did not spare our Lady or His Son from such suffering, should we expect Him to spare us? No, and Jesus told us so when He said:

***Whoever wishes to come after me, must deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me.***

In other words, we are to disown ourselves as the center of our existence. We must take up our cross, endure our sufferings as discipline, and keep our eyes on Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews teaches us how to make sense of our trials, suffering, and pain:

***Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,
and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking
in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body,
which is the church.***

This does not mean that Christ's suffering was deficient in any way. It wouldn't even take one drop of His blood to cleanse the entire universe. What is lacking? Our sacrifice, our discipline, our suffering, our offering-in short-our identification with Christ in His act of redemption. By carrying our cross, we unite our life's trials with our Lord's. Does Jesus need our suffering to redeem the human race? No! Does He desire it? Absolutely!

So, think about this for a moment. A man comes home from Mass, throws open the door, hugs his wife, lifts her up and carries her across the room. The wife gets a big smile on her face and asks: “Did Father Glenn preach on the necessity of being more romantic”? The husband says, “NO, HE TOLD US WE NEED TO CARRY OUR CROSS!” The husband then puts his wife down, and she immediately picks him up!

When I was a much younger young man, I went to Lourdes where Our Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Bernadette. In Lourdes, there is a spring of water that welled up during the apparition in 1858 and has been flowing ever since. Well, one thing you do when in Lourdes is to go into the baths. So, I’m a 21 year old in a foreign land. I don’t speak French, and the attendants are motioning me to take off my clothes to go into the baths. You see, after you undress, the attendants wrap an ice-cold, wet sheet around you to preserve modesty, and then you step down into a concrete bath filled with water which in May is about 33 degrees—maybe 34 degrees! As you might suspect, I was pretty anxious about the whole thing. But, at that moment, I received an inspiration to offer my anxiety for a purpose. I thought about my parents, who had stopped attending mass over the considerable and confusing changes they saw and heard from the pulpit after Vatican II. I continued to pray for them, and several months later my mom told me they had returned to mass! Two years ago my father died a very devout Catholic, and my mom continues to be a very strong Catholic. I thank Mary and praise God for this blessing.

When we unite our suffering, stresses, anxieties, torments, and the like, to Christ’s suffering, we are pleasing to God. For then, we become more like Christ, and as Scripture says:

...I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and constraints for the sake of Christ, for when I am weak it is then that I am strong.

What are we to do with suffering? Endure it as discipline. Bear it for Christ. Offer it for others. This does not mean that, in the face of a trial involving evil, chaos, or injustice, we are to be passive. It means that we embrace the discipline—we embrace the trial God sends our way.

Since it is rather difficult to think clearly when suffering comes on quickly, let's take some time right now and offer to Christ all our future suffering and ask God for inspiration so we remember this commitment. Rest assured, God will remember your intention. Let's take a few moments for this purpose. Please bow your heads:

*My beloved Jesus,
weighed down under the burden of my trials and sufferings,
I cast myself at Your feet,
that You may renew my strength and my courage,
for only Your infinite goodness can sustain me;
O Divine King, whose heart is so compassionate to the afflicted,
I wish to live in You; suffer and die in You.
During my life be to me my model and my support;
At the hour of my death, be my hope and my refuge. Amen.*