

HOMILY ~ 24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 14/15, 2024

How many of you have a cross that you wear on a chain around your neck? I sometimes wonder what meaning the cross has for people. For some people, I think it is a pretty piece of jewelry. For some people, I think it is a sign that they are Christian. I have a cross that is very meaningful to me. First, my mother bought it for me in Italy many years ago; and I never take it off. It reminds me of her and her unconditional love. It is a crucifix, which reminds me of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. It reminds me of his unconditional love as well. It is under my clothes most of the time so I cannot see it, but I can always feel it. It is a physical sign that reminds me that Jesus is with me all of the time.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus asks the Apostles, *"Who do you say that I am?"* Peter responds, *"You are the Christ."* This could also be translated, *"You are the Messiah."* Jesus began to teach the people telling them that he would have to suffer, die and be raised on the third day. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. We do not know exactly what Peter said, but I think it was something like this, *"If you want people to believe that you are the Messiah, you are going to have to stop talking like that. People expect the Messiah to step in and solve all of our problems. What is all this suffering and death?"* Jesus tells him, *"You have to take up your cross and follow me."*

Today, I think we would like to take the crosses out of being a Christian. We sometimes believe that if we do all the right things, God should give us an easy and comfortable life without crosses. That sounds nice, maybe that sounds like heaven, but we are not in heaven yet. That is not what life is. We all have crosses in our lives. Some of them are huge crosses, and I do not want to minimize the affect these have in our lives; but I do not want to talk about those today. I want to talk about the crosses that we have to take up every day. Regardless of where we are in our lives, our situation and our responsibilities can be the biggest joys and the biggest crosses in our lives. Our crosses may make us bitter, or make us a saint. The choice is ours.

Take being a parent. I think being a parent is extremely difficult. The children are all different, and they do not come with a set of instructions. Parents have to figure it out as they go along. Parents have told me that being a parent is one of the best jobs, but one of the hardest jobs they have ever had. The United States Surgeon General reported recently that 41%

of parents report that on most days they are so stressed, they cannot function; and this is particularly true of single parents. Our children have so many things to face today that they did not have to face a couple of generations ago. Because of the state of the world, our futures seem so uncertain. Sometimes from what parents post on social media, it looks like everyone else has it figured out except you. Parents report high levels of loneliness. They feel isolated. Parents need to remember that they are never alone. God is with us always and helps us, so we need to be aware of what he is bringing into our lives. God will bring the people into our lives who will help us, but we have to be open to and accept that help. Lean on family and close friends, but remember that support frequently comes from people we never expected. Parents should not try to do it alone. No one expects you to do it alone. It takes a village. Our St. Edith community can be a community of support. Lean on each other. I am very happy when I see our young families connecting and getting to know each other. Sometimes you just need someone who is situated similarly to talk to. Remind yourself every day what a joy your children can be, even on the days that you do not like them very much.

Married couples have their crosses as well. I think if you have a very strong marriage, there is no better relationship in this world; but it requires that each individual be willing to give 100% every day. That can be a cross. The day you stop working on your marriage will be the day you start having problems. Taking care of a sick friend or relative has its crosses, particularly if it goes on for an extended period of time; however, the satisfaction you get from caring for someone that cannot care for themselves brings tremendous satisfaction. It can lead to a very close intimate relationship with that individual that never would have developed otherwise. Celibacy is not such a bad thing. I do not have any of the crosses that come with a spouse and children, but I do not have any of those joys. I do not have that special family to build a life with, and that can be a cross; but I have great friends and family, and I have all of you.

Our greatest joys and crosses come from the situation that you find yourself in life. Are the crosses going to make you bitter or are they going to make you a saint? Remind yourself of the joys each day. Remember you are never alone. Be open to the help that comes from God and accept it. You are part of a great community at St. Edith. Get involved with the community. Wear that cross around your neck and reach for it when you need to be reassured.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim