

- Last Sunday I spoke about the very important virtue of faith. As you may recall, the Letter to the Hebrews teaches us that, “Faith is the realization of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).
- This same passage also teaches us that, “without faith, it is impossible to please God” (v. 6).
- According to the *Catechism*, “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because He is truth itself. By faith ‘man freely commits his entire self to God.’” (CCC 1814).
- As I mentioned last Sunday, there are really 3 elements to Faith: we must believe in God, Who is Truth itself, and the teachings of His one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church; we must act on this belief through works of charity and hoping for Heaven; and we must profess our belief in our Lord and His teachings before others.
- While all of us are given the gift of faith when we are baptized – along with the virtues of hope and charity as well – many of us lose faith or allow our faith to be compromised when suffering enters into our lives.
- This is generally because we don’t understand the value of suffering – and how it’s necessary to suffer to enter Heaven.
- To be true to the name of Christian, which we bear on our souls, means to be like Christ. Yet Christ suffered; He suffered for us and because of us. So if we wish to be like Christ in all things, then we must be willing to suffer too. The problem is that we don’t like suffering.
- And many of us are unwilling to suffer, at least in part, because we’re conditioned by our society to avoid it, searching so endlessly as we do for ease and comfort.
- In fact, our decadent society can breed a proud selfishness within us that makes us believe we shouldn’t have to suffer. But to reject suffering as being beneath us or unworthy of us is really to reject Christ and His cross.
- Rejecting suffering is rejecting the means of our salvation, and so Christians must be willing to embrace with faith whatever suffering God permits to befall us, trusting that God knows what’s best for us.
- You see, every suffering that enters into our lives is an opportunity for us to embrace Christ and His cross, to be with Christ on His cross, to imitate Him, and to bear our share of hardship for the sake of the Gospel.
- And when we do it well: when we suffer patiently and without complaint – and especially if we can suffer joyfully – then our suffering makes us more like Christ; it makes us holy.
- Willingly taking up the crosses that come into our lives strengthens our wills, helps us to make reparation for sin, and it opens us up to receiving God’s grace.
- So rather than allowing our times of suffering to lead us to question God’s goodness or be angry with God, which damages our faith, we must see our sufferings as a sign of His love.
- In faith we must believe that God allows us to suffer because He wants us to become more like Christ and grow in holiness.
- In faith we must believe that whatever suffering God permits in our lives is because He’s providing a means for us to prepare ourselves for Heaven!
- Last Sunday I briefly mentioned Abraham as an icon of faithfulness, for he always trusted God, even when asked by Him to do difficult things. But another icon of faith who is even more near and dear to our hearts as Catholics is St. Joseph.

- Today, May 1st, is the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, which reminds us of the dignity of work and honors St. Joseph as the model of one who labors in union with Jesus Christ.
- Looking at our stained glass window in which we see St. Joseph working away in the midst of Jesus and Mary, it's easy for us to imagine how Joseph was faithful to his duties as a husband and father, perfectly fulfilling the dictates of his vocation.
- As the model of all workers, we know that St. Joseph was just, prudent, and diligent in all his affairs. But St. Joseph is also an icon of faith for us, just like Abraham.
- Over the years as I've prayed and meditated upon the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, I've come to realize that St. Joseph suffered a lot in order to fulfill faithfully the work God had given him – yet he did so without ever losing faith. Rather he became more faithful!
- When we meditate upon the 1st Joyful Mystery, the Annunciation, we generally focus upon Mary's yes to St. Gabriel's news that God had chosen her to be the mother of His only begotten Son.
- But think about what that meant to St. Joseph when Mary became pregnant and he knew the child wasn't his. He must have felt betrayed, and yet the Gospels tell us that he refused to expose Our Lady to shame.
- Of course when St. Joseph was told the miraculous truth about Mary's pregnancy by an angel in a dream, he did not hesitate to take her as his wife and to agree to become the earthly father of the Messiah!
- Being the diligent and loving husband he was, imagine the anxiety St. Joseph suffered when he could not find a place in an inn for his immaculate wife to deliver their divine Son!
- Or think of the suffering St. Joseph experienced when told in a dream that Jesus' life was in danger, and that he must pick up his family at once and flee to Egypt to start a new life there.
- Moreover, Joseph was not immune to the Mary's suffering when told of Jesus' future sufferings by the aged Simeon and that a sword would pierce her heart. He would have felt her pain, too! Joseph also suffered terribly when Jesus was lost for 3 days.
- Of course there was the ever-present pressure of caring for Jesus, the Messiah, and His perfectly sinless mother Mary! And yet through it all, St. Joseph was always obedient, always trustworthy, always faithful.
- I bring all of this up because it's good for us to meditate on St. Joseph's life and to see his faithful response to so many hardships and trials. Reflecting on his life (or the life of any saint) encourages us to imitate their virtues, especially their faith.
- I think what helped St. Joseph be so faithful is that he never focused on himself or his own needs. Rather, he was always focused on caring for the needs of Jesus and Mary. And in this humble self-forgetfulness, he found the freedom to be faithful.
- Forgetting oneself and humbly focusing on others . . . it's the key to imitating Jesus and growing in all the virtues. As ironic as it sounds, it's when we stop focusing on what we think we need that we can become the people God wants us to be.
- With St. Joseph as our model and intercessor, may all we learn to be forgetful of self so that we can focus on God and others, and in this freedom from self-concern stay faithful to what our Lord asks of us, even in the midst of terrible sufferings.
- Joseph most Faithful, pray for us.