

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I would like to start our reflection this morning telling you a really goofy story about a man trying to cross the street. Every time he steps off the curb a car comes screaming around the corner and heads straight for him. Time and again he has to jump back on the curb. Finally, he steps out into the street, walking as fast as he can. Just as he's stepping into the next lane, a car changes lanes and comes charging right at him. He jumps back, but the car swerves and again is bearing down on him. He runs to the middle of the street, and the car heads right at him. As the car bears down on him, it screeches to a halt beside him. The driver rolls down the window of the car, and it turns out a squirrel is driving the car. The squirrel says to the man, "See, it's not as easy as it looks, is it?"

Most of us have found that life isn't easy, is it? No matter how hard we try; no matter how good we are; no matter how prayerful we are or how virtuous our lives, life sometimes kicks us in the head. At such times we feel like a squirrel trying to cross a busy street and it seems like there's nowhere left to turn.

On this Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are invited by Christ in our Gospel text to reflect on the Truth of God to which we are guided by the Holy Spirit sent to us by the Father. The first and most basic truth is spoken to us by the Wisdom of God in our first reading from the Book of Proverbs, "I found delight in the human race".

Think about it, Church! God is saying that no matter our circumstances; no matter how good or bad we are; no matter whether we are right or we are wrong; no matter how kind and generous we are or how selfish or miserly we might be, God delights in us.

The second great Truth of God revealed to us today by St. Paul in our second reading is not only can “we boast of the glory of God... but we can even boast of our afflictions”. Isn’t that a strange idea—to boast of our afflictions, our suffering? How can we possibly boast of our afflictions, glory in our sufferings? Suffering hurts! Afflictions are almost always painful! Many of us spend our lives trying to avoid suffering. In fact, in our attempts to avoid suffering and pain, we have developed an epidemic of addiction to pain-killing drugs in our country, where only 5% of the world’s population is consuming more than 90% of opioid drugs that are being produced.

Therefore, this is, perhaps a good time to talk about the role of suffering in our lives. St. Paul is telling us that suffering and pain is not designed to destroy us, but to make us stronger. He says that we can “even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint...”

Possibly we can begin to understand this concept by comparing it to a term used in the National Football League. The term is Y-A-C, which stands for Yards After Contact. The phrase was coined by the legendary football coach and analyst, John Madden.

It refers to what happens when an opposing player makes contact with a running back. He doesn’t throw the ball down or just stop or

holler about the hit. No! He keeps his legs churning, pushing forward, gaining one, two, three or more yards. The best running backs in the NFL are the ones who gain the most important yardage—first downs and touchdowns—after they have been hit.

St. Paul is telling us that’s what God means for us to do when life strikes us a mean blow—keep moving forward; keep struggling toward the goal. That’s how we become stronger. That’s how we build up the spiritual resources we need to successfully deal with life. Bad times, sickness, suffering, pain are not designed to defeat us. They are there to make us stronger.

The endurance of adversity, St. Paul tells us, develops our character. The story is told of a Bible study class that was asked, “In your time of discouragement, what is your favorite Scripture”? One person quoted the 23rd Psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Another quoted Psalm 46: “God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.” A woman quoted a verse from the 16th chapter of John’s Gospel, “In this world you shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Finally, an 80 year old gentleman spoke up and he said, “and it came to pass 85 times in the Bible.” The class started laughing, thinking old John was beginning to lose it.

When the laughter and the snickering stopped, John said, “At 30 I lost my job with six hungry children and a wife to feed. I didn’t know how I would make it. At 40 my oldest son was killed in

Vietnam. At 50 my house burned to the ground and we lost everything. At 60 my wife of 40 years got cancer. It slowly ate away at her. We cried together many a night on our knees in prayer. At 65 she died. I still miss her today. The pain I have endured throughout my life was overwhelming. I wondered where God was. But each time I looked in the Bible, I saw one of those 85 verses that said, “and it came to pass”. I believe God was telling me, my pain and my circumstances were also going to pass and that God would get me through it. That’s why I say, “and it came to pass” gives me courage in times of trouble.”

“Affliction produces endurance, and endurance proven character...” St. Paul tells us today.

That proven character then leads to hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Recently, I had a conversation with my brother-in-law, Andy, a very successful businessman who runs his own now international company. I also know that he and my sister, Margaret Mary, pray the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary together every morning before he leaves for work. As we talked, the word wisdom kept coming up in our conversation. So, I asked him, “Andy, how does a person get wisdom? Few of us every talk about it, but how is wisdom acquired?”

Andy’s answer was quick and to the point, “Pain!” He said only that one word, “Pain”. As I looked deeply into his eyes, I knew that

his one-word answer was not theoretical. Andy and pain had gotten to know each other quite well over the years. And I knew it. I had lived through much of it with him.

In his career he had struggled through much pain and disappointment time and time again. He had achieved a certain level of success and endured many disappointments and failures over the years. But he struggled through all of that and has now, at 77 years of age, reached the point where his multi-national company can be passed on to his children.

I don't pretend to understand why God created a world in which there is so much suffering. But I do believe that in our struggles God is seeking to do something wonderful in our lives and in our world. I believe that because I believe the Wisdom of God that tells me that God "finds delight in the human race".

The lyrics of a beautiful song by Andre Crouch says it better than I can:

Tell them even if they don't believe you; just tell them, even if they don't receive you.

Oh, tell them for me; tell them for me; please, please, tell them for me, tell them that I love them, and I came to let them know.

Tell them when it seems they are forsaken; just tell them though it seems their earth is shaken.

Oh, tell them for me, tell them for me, please, please, tell them for me, tell them that I love them, and I came to let them know.

Tell that lovely man who walks the cold street all alone; tell that crying child who doesn't have a home. Tell those hungry people, dying and lost in the desert. They don't even know that I care.

Tell them for me please. Tell that that I love them. Oh, tell them on the streets and on the highways, and tell them even on the bi-ways.

Tell them I can mend the broken-hearted; and restore the ones who have parted, and I have come to let them know. I came to let them know. Please, please, they must know. Tell them! Tell them that I love them!