

- Last Sunday I used the image of expanding one's soul as a way of speaking about the process of growing in holiness.
- Because our Lord dwells in our souls through baptism, as Christians we should seek to increase the capacity of our soul so that our Lord will find in it a comfortable home.
- According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, we can judge the capacity of our soul by how much charity we possess. But expanding the capacity of our soul isn't just a matter of practicing the virtue of charity.
- Holiness requires that we make our souls pleasing to God in every way! And this requires purification. So last Sunday I spoke about the necessity of praying and fasting.
- Through prayer we learn how to focus our attention on God so that we can come to know and trust Him. In prayer we learn to submit ourselves to God's humble yoke, and we receive the grace to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him.
- And by the practice of denying ourselves through fasting those things that we enjoy, we learn to master our wills so that we have the courage to turn away from even the most enticing sins.
- So, while the evil one does test and tempt us, just as he tested and tempted Jesus in the desert, with God's grace we can conquer the devil, and over time be freed from the bondage of sin so that we can become more pleasing to God.
- In speaking of people with "spacious" souls, St. Bernard says they, "cannot afford to be entangled in law-suits nor by worldly cares; [they] cannot be enslaved by gluttony and sensual pleasures, by the lust of the eyes, the ambition to rule, or by pride in the possession of power. If [they are] to become heaven, the dwelling place of God, it is first of all essential that [they] be empty of all these defects" (SBoC: *Song of Songs*, 27:10).
- What St. Bernard is saying here is that being attached to worldly things is absolutely incompatible with "soul-expanding" holiness. So, in addition to prayer and fasting, we must detach ourselves from the things of the world, especially our mortal sins.
- You see, there is a radical detachment from the things of the world as well as from one's own sinful desires that is necessary in order for one's soul to expand to such an extent that our infinite Lord finds it a comfortable home.
- As we move away from and detach ourselves from the things of the world, we become more and more capable of attaching ourselves to God! Remember: you cannot love both God and mammon. We all must choose Whom or what we will love in this life.
- Truly, the soul that chooses the mammon of this world over God and persists in mortal sin will never be a fitting home for our Lord in this life, and that soul will be denied entrance into our Lord's eternal home in the next life.
- But if we seek freedom from worldly attachments, strive to live in a perpetual state of grace, and if we are truly humble, then our Lord Himself will set to work on our soul to make of it a fitting dwelling place for Himself!
- Just as our Lord was transfigured before Sts. Peter, James, and John in our Gospel today, so too does He work through the power of His Holy Spirit to transfigure our souls so that they can be a fitting dwelling for our Lord.

- However, I must warn you that, just as sharp scalpels are necessary to excise a cancerous tumor from a body, so too are painful treatments necessary to excise the grave sin from our lives. Our Lord's favorite tool for such a procedure is suffering.
- As I've mentioned so many times from this pulpit, sin disfigures and distorts our true selves. Sin corrupts and misshapes us. So the process of being remodeled and reshaped into an image of Christ is necessarily painful.
- But we must keep in mind the words of St. Paul to St. Timothy in our epistle today, that our Lord has "saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our own works but according to His own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus.
- And therefore, we must be willing, as St. Paul says, to "bear [our] share of hardship for the Gospel." We must be willing to suffer through whatever pain and suffering is necessary to rid our souls of sinful and worldly attachments.
- Suffering, of course, comes to us in a variety of ways. Sometimes we deserve it, such as bad consequences that befall us after a sinful choice on our part.
- But other times, suffering totally unrelated to our sins enters our lives, like the loss of a loved one, a terrible accident, a catastrophic loss of property, or a serious illness.
- And as these sufferings come, we may be tempted to be angry with God for allowing something so bad to happen. But in truth, my brothers and sisters, every form of suffering that we must endure is a gift from God, if we have the eyes of faith to see it.
- I say this because there is always a lesson to be learned from suffering. God always has a way of bringing some good out of the evil of suffering. If we are willing to face our sufferings with faith in God's goodness, our sufferings can be transformative.
- If we bear all sufferings with faith, we learn to cling to our Lord with a confident hope of eternal union with Him. And as we hope in God, we in turn learn to love Him more.
- This is part of the meaning of our Gospel today. Jesus' transfiguration prepared the apostles for their future trials by fortifying them with hope of the glory to come, and their hope in Christ and love for Him helped them to suffer even martyrdom for Jesus.
- Thus, we too must keep before us the vision of Christ glorified, realizing that we are called to that same glory – but only if we endure our sufferings with virtue.
- When we endure our sufferings with faith, hope, and a true love for God, then our sufferings help us to make reparation for our sins. They also help us to see how short this life really is and to cling to God all the more. This is what expands our souls!
- Ultimately, in the face of suffering, we have to make the decision to allow our souls either to expand in holiness by suffering with a faith that leads us to hope in God and love Him all the more, or to contract in anger, despair, and self-centeredness.
- While painful, the sufferings of this life are the necessary crucible through which we all must pass if we wish our souls to expand so that they might be transfigured into the likeness of Christ.
- So as we continue along our Lenten journey toward the glories of Easter, may we all resolve to accept and endure our sufferings with faith so that we might hope in God and love Him all the more.
- And in practicing these virtues, may our souls be expanded so that we might be, with Christ, God's beloved in children in whom He is well pleased.