

- The saints are some of the greatest gifts of the Church, for they show us the great heights to which our fallen human nature can be raised – and in this, they give us hope.
- The saints are the most authentic examples of what is truly human, for though we have all been plagued by original sin and are sinful creatures, God has created man for Himself. God has created us to be holy, to be virtuous. So, we are *most* human when we are holy.
- Indeed, God desires our holiness because He desires our salvation. Growing in genuine holiness and virtue is the greatest assurance we can have of being saved.
- Sadly, while God desires to save all men, not all men desire to be saved by God.
- This is because holiness is difficult! Anyone who earnestly strives for holiness knows just how elusive true holiness can be. Holiness requires transformation! It requires dying to self in order to live as Christ would have us live. Holiness requires suffering.
- This weekend the Church celebrates the feast day of one of Her more enigmatic saints: St. Rose of Lima – whose lovely statue stands next to that of St. Maria Goretti.
- As a 3rd Order Dominican, St. Rose's statue is also placed next to the window showing her spiritual father, St. Dominic, receive the Rosary from Our Lady, while St. Catherine of Siena – the saint Rose sought to imitate – receives the crown of thorns from our infant Lord.
- Incidentally, St. Rose of Lima was also a friend and confidant of the Dominican St. Martin de Porres, our saint with a broom in our apse wall mural.
- Given to severe penances and long vigils of prayer, St. Rose is one of the great mystics of the Church, and she was often graced with ecstatic experiences in prayer. But she also suffered a great deal in life.
- What's beautiful about St. Rose's writings is that they help us understand the value of suffering, which St. Rose so willingly and courageously embraced in her life – and through which she became the great saint that she is.
- You see, while our Lord has given us the sacraments as the primary vehicles for conveying to us His saving graces, sometimes we need more than just the sacraments to be holy.
- The sacraments act like medicine for the soul, but sometimes surgery is necessary to properly heal the wounds caused by our sins. The surgical scalpel that God uses is suffering.
- This is why our second reading today from Hebrews tells us not to disdain the discipline of the Lord. While suffering is painful, the author of Hebrews tells us that it's actually the cause for joy, because "it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness."
- When we humbly accept the sufferings that come into our lives and unite them to Christ's suffering on the cross, we grow in grace – a grace that has the power to transform our hearts and heal the wounds caused by our sinfulness.
- This is because when we suffer in union with Christ, we become more like Christ Himself. Suffering, borne well, actually helps to restore the image of God within us that has been damaged and distorted by sin. Suffering, borne well, merits for us so many graces.
- So if we wish to strengthen our drooping hands and our weak knees and make straight paths for our feet, then we must bear our trials and sufferings patiently.
- As we do, we are transformed and grow in holiness – being made able to enter through the narrow gate of Heaven our Lord mention in the Gospel today.
- This is what St. Rose of Lima teaches us through her writings. Indeed, St. Rose once wrote about our Lord speaking to her in prayer, saying to her:

Let all men know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Let them know that the gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase. Let men take care not to stray and be deceived. This is the only true stairway to paradise, and without the cross they can find no road to climb to Heaven.

- In meditating on our Lord's words to her, St. Rose wrote: "We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions. We must heap trouble upon trouble to attain a deep participation in the divine nature, the glory of the sons of God and perfect happiness of soul." She goes on:

If only mortals would learn how great it is to possess divine grace, how beautiful, how noble, how precious. How many riches it hides within itself, how many joys and delights! Without doubt they would devote all their care and concern to winning for themselves pains and afflictions. All men throughout the world would seek trouble, infirmities and torments, instead of good fortune, in order to attain the unfathomable treasure of grace. This is the reward and the final gain of patience. No one would complain about his cross or about troubles that may happen to him, if he would come to know the scales on which they are weighed when they are distributed to men.

- These are difficult words to take in, but they comport perfectly with the message of our epistle from the Letter to the Hebrews today.
- So often when suffering comes into our lives, we immediately look for relief. We cringe and cry, sometimes wondering why God is punishing us, or we even become angry because we proudly think we shouldn't have to suffer or don't deserve to suffer.
- But what if we were to change our attitude toward suffering? What if we were to look upon our sufferings as a gift of grace? Think of the words we read today in Hebrews:

Endure your trials as 'discipline'; God treats you as sons. For what 'son' is there whom his father does not discipline? At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

- What we learn here is that we must develop our eyes of faith so that we can see our sufferings in this light, as gifts of grace that God allows to bring forth the fruit of righteousness within us.
- I know that many of us in this community are suffering a great deal right now. Financial worries, the untimely death of loved ones, health concerns, infertility, miscarriages, and family discord are afflicting so many of us right now.
- Of course, as a community we're also facing the impending loss of the Latin Mass from our parish, which has become so near and dear to so many of us.
- Yet, what saints like St. Rose teach us is that, if we could see our sufferings as gifts from God to make us more like Himself, we would actually seek them out!
- Brothers and sisters, suffering comes to all of us at times. Painful though it is, it is always a gift of grace from our loving Father. May we have the faith to see all suffering as the gift it is, and may we be courageous in embracing our sufferings so as to gain the graces that come from it.

- May we all grow in holiness through our sufferings.
- St. Rose of Lima, pray for us.