

**Homily for the 75th Anniversary
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish, Springfield, Illinois**

Mass for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C | August 13th, 2022 AD

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here today to celebrate together the 75th anniversary of your parish. My first thoughts today are of thanksgiving to all of you for everything, big and small, that you have given to this parish over the past three-quarters of a century. How much history has happened in the world, and even just here in Springfield over those years! I look forward to hearing some of the stories you have from this parish as we continue our celebration after Mass today, but lest I get off track reminiscing about what this parish has done since 1947, I know there is someone else we must extend gratitude to today, and that is Our Lord. As grateful as I am to all of you, few of you have supported this parish through all of its 75 years, and none of you has carried the Catholic Church through its almost-2,000 years of history... but Christ, our King, has done just that!

As we meditate on the scripture readings that the Church has given us today, we find a consistent call to *perseverance* in our life of faith. Usually, during moments of celebration like this, we easily forget the hard times that

we had to endure to get here, but it seems that today Our Lord is reminding us that carrying forward our faith in Him is not always easy!

Consider Jeremiah. As the Babylonians approached the walls of Jerusalem, he was the only prophet to speak authentically for God and tell the people to surrender. Giving up, when exile is the consequence, is never a popular opinion, but Jeremiah had spoken again and again that the sins and unfaithfulness of the Israelites would have consequences, and to surrender to the Babylonians, now, was actually their best way back to God. To keep fighting, or to turn to Egypt for help, or to look for another way out, was to remain stubbornly unrepenting of their sins, and would be a futile attempt at continued self-dependency. They had tried their own way for so long, now Jeremiah called them to put themselves into the hands of God. Yes, there would be sufferings because of their sins, but God would bring them back to the blessings of the Holy Land once that purification had taken place. Lest I neglect to mention, we should notice that Jeremiah himself suffered his own consequences for voicing this call of God: he was thrown in a cistern to die, and his life was saved only by the timely intervention of someone in the king's court who remained faithful. We too, when we voice

the call of God to our homes, or parishes, or cultures, will often find it is not the most popular message!

Yet, God's message to us is not just "repent, turn back to Me!", He also beckons us to follow Him down the path of the cross that He has already traveled before us. The Letter to the Hebrews uses the image of a running-race, with the competitors making their final lap around the stadium, surrounded by those who have already run the race, and keeping their eyes fixed not so much on the finish line, but on Jesus Himself. "Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). I have run a number of marathons and other races over the years, and sometimes the miles get very hard, and by the end you can be in a good bit of pain, but if you have crowds cheering you on, and especially if you have someone to run with, even the hardest miles become possible. Similarly, Jesus has "endured the cross" before us, so when we find ourselves similarly tested - needing to repent of our sins, or to sacrifice ourselves to do God's will, or suffering a time of loss, or when

we are called to speak truth when it is not popular ... whenever we carry the cross, we are assured that we do not run alone!

I find a similar message, at first challenging, but then deeply consoling, in Jesus' words to His disciples in the Gospel. He tells them of a second baptism that he must endure: a baptism of fire and anguish, the baptism of the cross. And then He says that they will go through it too. "From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:52). As followers of Jesus, we should not expect to avoid the cross leaving its mark on our lives and families either. I suspect most of you have members of your family that you are distant from because you have chosen to prioritize Jesus, and they have chosen not to. This is a place of great pain for many families; I have felt it with some of my relatives too. Jesus does not offer us an easy solution today, He simply, and sadly, tells us that those who are faithful to Him will be rejected for their continued faith. He tells us what being a disciple will cost, and then asks if we will choose Him.

The thing is, God never forces us to choose Him. Plenty of Israelites did not follow Jeremiah's word, plenty of Christians have also given up the race half-way through, and plenty of Jesus' disciples then, and now, turned

away at the prospect of losing family or friends, but many have remained faithful! The reason that we celebrate 75 years here today is because ordinary Catholics from this parish, decade after decade, generation after generation, persevered as best they could in faith in Christ, and passed on their knowledge of Him to the next generation. We pray today not only in thanksgiving for their diligent devotion and His persevering love, but also for that gift of final perseverance for ourselves as well.

To close, I simply recall an anecdote from your patron saint, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, who, while celebrating one of the anniversaries of her profession as a religious sister, was stuck on a boat, far from a tabernacle and the possibility of receiving Holy Communion. She traveled thousands of miles over her lifetime to establish the schools and hospitals that have done such beautiful work of mercy ever since, and on September 14th, 1894, she was stuck on one such difficult and uncomfortable journey. She recorded her thoughts that day: "The sisters, remembering that today is the anniversary of my profession, were sad thinking if I were on land I could have received Communion. I appreciated their compassion but, on the other hand, only a day ago Jesus came to rest in me and I seem to feel His presence within me

yet.” And then, we recall Jacob’s mystic dream. Sleeping on a stone he saw a mysterious ladder reaching from earth to heaven, on which angels of God ascended and descended... “Even though we are at sea, far from the holy tabernacle of love, here even at sea there is also that mysterious ladder that touches heaven. The angels also ascend and descend for us, and from the summit Jesus watches over us and makes us generous promises. We too, like Jacob, can repeat, “Truly the Lord is in this place, and we did not know it.” “Therefore, even at sea I am happy to celebrate the most cherished anniversary of my life. Jesus, at the top of the ladder, watches kindly over me. I invite Him, and He immediately comes to me spiritually, deigning to come down to our ship, the *Fulda*, to grace us and all our fellow passengers. What a great grace!” [Letter from Mother Cabrini, September 14, 1894, <https://cabrinishrinenyc.org/a-letter-from-mother-cabrini/>]

We too travel on sometimes-stormy seas, but Jesus is with us also. Let us persevere in His grace today, and every day of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.