

“...whoever wishes to save his life, will lose it..”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, James DuPont, of the DuPont Company, recalled an episode that happened to him when he was 7 years old.

One midnight, he was awakened out of a dead sleep. His mother was sobbing loudly. It was the first time he had ever heard her cry. He describes the incident this way:

“My dad’s voice was low and troubled as he tried to comfort my mother. In their anguish, they both forgot the nearness of my bedroom. I overheard them.”

Then he adds:

“While their problem... has long since been solved and forgotten, the big discovery I made that night is STILL right here...deep within me.”

DuPont’s discovery was this:

“Life is not all hearts and flowers. Much of the time...it’s hard and cruel.”

All of us can relate to that seven-year-old boy lying in bed, listening to his mother crying.

We, too, remember hearing our mother cry. We, too, remember the impact it had on us. We, too, remember how it made us aware, perhaps for the first time, that life is not all hearts and flowers, that...sometimes, it’s hard and cruel.

And so, we can relate to the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Mark. He says:

“If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me.”

In other words, suffering and sorrow are like hurricanes and floods. They are a part of life. And there’s no way we can escape them.

But...and there’s that proverbial **BUT** in life, again, Jesus goes on to say something remarkable:

“Whoever wants to save his (own) life will lose it; BUT... Whoever loses his life for me and the Gospel... will save it.”

*In other words, Jesus says the important thing in life isn’t the sorrow and suffering that befall us. The important thing is how we **respond** to them. The important thing is what we **do** about them.*

*Maybe we **can’t** avoid sorrow and suffering, **but** we **can do** something with them. We can turn them into something **constructive**, not **destructive**. We can turn them into something **life-giving**, not death-**dealing**. We can turn them into something that makes us **better**, not **bitter**.*

“How so?” you ask. Well, of course, I am glad you asked that question!

I will first answer with 2 or 3 examples, then give the explanation.

Until he was 25 years old, Eugene O’Neill was a complete failure! His life was without purpose, without discipline, without direction.

Suddenly, one day, he got seriously ill and was rushed to the hospital. It was during his long stay at the hospital that he got the chance to do something he had never done before. He got a chance to think about his life and where it was headed. It was also in the hospital that he discovered he had a talent, of all things... for writing... plays!

Eventually, Eugene O’Neill recovered, took up a writing career, and went on to revolutionize American drama. It all happened because O’Neill reacted to sorrow and suffering in a constructive way. He responded to them in a life-giving way.

Now, take Golda Meir, for example. As a young person, she felt depressed because she was not beautiful. She wrote:

“It was only much later that I realized that not being beautiful was a ‘blessing in disguise.’ It forced me to develop inner resources. I came to understand that women, who can’t lean on their beauty...have to work extra hard and, therefore, actually have the advantage.”

In other words, Golda Meir accepted her cross. She didn’t cry out against it. She didn’t fret over it or resent it. She acknowledged it, picked it up, and carried it courageously.

Golda Meir went on to become the first woman prime minister of Israel!

Finally, take the case of Oscar Wilde. At the height of his writing career, he was convicted of a moral’s charge. After he returned from prison, he could no longer write superficial comedies. He no longer had a heart for the frivolous.

Wilde wrote, in what has to be one of the most beautiful lines of poetry ever written,

**“Where sorrow is... there is holy ground.” And,
“How else... but through the broken heart may our Lord Christ enter in?”**

Oscar Wilde used his humiliating, prison-experience as an occasion to grow & become better, not bitter. In the spirit of today’s Gospel, he turned it into an experience that was life-giving, not death-dealing.

The stories of Eugene O’Neill, Golda Meir, & Oscar Wilde illustrate that...the important thing in life is not the sorrow & sufferings that befall us. The important thing is how we respond to them.

If we refuse to accept the sorrow and the sufferings, if we refuse to pick up these crosses and carry them, we actually end up losing our life!

BUT, if we pick them up and carry them courageously, exactly as Jesus did, we can turn them into something positive. We can turn them into something life-giving...just as did Eugene O’Neill, Golda Meir, and Oscar Wilde!

And so—like the seven-year-old boy from our opening story, sooner or later, childhood innocence is lost and we discover that life is not all hearts and flowers. It’s often hard and cruel.

BUT, we discover something else. God often uses such imposters to fashion us into better people ...into warmer people, humbler people, more compassionate people, more understanding people, more patient people, more... forgiving people!

Sorrow and suffering can open our eyes to a far richer, more beautiful life than we ever... dreamed... possible!

I now sum up today’s Gospel with these simple words:

**“I walked a mile with Pleasure; she chatted all the way,
But left me none the wiser, for all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow, and ne’er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her, when Sorrow walked with me.”**

May our ever-present, ever-loving God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.