

“Do not let your hearts be troubled...”

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

Once upon a time, little, four-year-old Marion West would shout and jump for joy each noon when her mother came home from work on her lunch break.

Her mother would pick her up from the next door neighbor's. They'd hurry home, eat lunch, and play together. **BUT**...Marion would get hysterical when her mother left after lunch.

One day, her mother stopped coming home for lunch. Marion was saddened. She wondered why her mother stopped coming. She wondered why she stopped eating and playing with her. She wondered if she'd done something wrong, if her mother still loved her as much as she once did.

Years later, Marion learned that her mother still came home each noon. She sat at her kitchen window, out of sight, eating her lunch and watching Marion play in the neighbor's yard below.

All the while, she longed to be with Marion. She longed to hold her close, especially when she'd scratch her hand or scrape a knee and cry. **BUT**—it was for Marion's good that she didn't.

Eventually, Marion adjusted to her mother's absence and grew up in a healthy way.

Looking back on it now, Marion sees why her mother stopped coming. It was for her own good, for her own growth and development.

I share this true story with you because it has something in common with today's Gospel that I/ the deacon just read to you from St. John. There, Jesus says in effect:

“You are sad that I tell you that I must leave you. You are distressed and fearful. **BUT**... I tell you, it is better for you that I go. For then, my Father will send the Holy Spirit to help you grow and develop in a new way.”

In other words, Jesus is saying to his disciples that it is time for him to leave them for a while. It is time for them to begin a new phase in their spiritual growth. It is time for them to grow & develop in a new way.

You see, what is true for four-year-old Marion & what is true for the disciples is also true for us!

There come times in our lives when God seems to abandon us. There are times in our lives when God seems to leave us for a while.

For example, take our prayer. Perhaps there was a time when we experienced deep peace from our prayer. **BUT**, now, we seem to draw very little from it.

For example, take our faith. Perhaps there was a time when our faith seemed strong enough to move mountains. **BUT**, now, it's as though it couldn't move a molehill.

For example, take our religious & parish-commitment, our spiritual life. Perhaps we once derived great satisfaction from working in Marriage Preparation, RCIA, lecturing, ministering as a Greeter or an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. Maybe we once enjoyed working at the bingo or annual festival/picnic or parish dinners. Now, we derive very little joy from such. It's as though God has abandoned us.

We begin to wonder if God still loves us as much as he once did, just as little Marion began to wonder about her mother's love.

The truth is ...God loves us very much. He loves us as much as he ever did. God doesn't change. He can't. He is immutable, unchangeable ...because he is perfect. He has no 'room' to change!

God knows there are times for us to grow, that is, to begin a new phase in our spiritual growth ...just as Marion did ...just as the disciples did!

For example, it is time for us to realize that prayer can take place without deep feeling on our part. In fact, the best prayer takes place when our heart seems to turn to stone and we have no feeling at all. For it is then that we truly pray ...with faith!

For example, it is time for us to realize faith is not a feeling, all warm and fuzzy. Much like love, faith is a commitment, far more than a warm & fuzzy feeling. It's a surrender of ourselves to God. It's saying 'yes' to God, even when we don't sense or feel his presence—just as Marion did not sense or feel her mother's presence (although she was very close)!

For example, perhaps it's time for us to realize that the motive for our religious and parish-involvement ought not to come, primarily, from the satisfaction we feel or get from it.

We get involved because we know in our heart ...Jesus asked us to.
We get involved because we know in our heart ...Jesus called us to.
We get involved because we know in our heart ...Jesus taught us to.
We get involved because we know ...Jesus did!

Once upon a time, there was a man who collected butterflies and moths. One day, while walking through a park, he saw the cocoon of a rare moth hanging from the twig of a tree. He clipped the twig and took the cocoon home.

A few days later, he saw some movement from inside the cocoon, but the moth didn't emerge. The next day, he saw movement again, but again, nothing happened. When this happened a third day, the man couldn't stand it any longer. He took a very sharp, Exacto-knife and, very carefully, with tweezers, slit open the cocoon.

Freed, at last, the moth crawled out. **BUT**—to the moth-collector's dismay, it was undeveloped and soon, within minutes, died. Later, a biologist-friend explained why. He said that nature has arranged it in such a way that a moth **MUST** struggle to escape the cocoon. It is the struggle that causes it to develop properly and makes it strong enough to survive outside the cocoon! You see, when the well-meaning moth-collector tried to make it easy for the moth, cutting it free, he inadvertently destroyed its chances to grow and develop properly.

Something like that can happen with us. 'How so?' you ask.

Well, it's about time—I am glad you asked that question!

Sometimes, God may program struggle into our lives. It can be his way to help us to grow.

God may arrange things so, at a certain point in our prayer life, we must struggle.
God may arrange things so, at a certain point in our faith life, we must struggle.
God may arrange things so, at a certain point in our spiritual life, we must struggle.

Don't make the mistake, however, to think that we are like puppets on a string and God is manufacturing every calamity or tragedy that comes our way to test us. Things just 'go wrong' in life and it's not, necessarily, God's will that they 'go wrong.'

However, if in fact, 'struggle' **IS** what happens to us, rest assured, all the while we are struggling, God is close at hand, just as little Marion's mother was close at hand, when she was struggling.

I will now close with this poem, which I have used before. It sums up what I am trying to say:

"For ev'ry pain we must bear, for ev'ry burden, ev'ry care ...there's a reason.
For ev'ry grief that bows the head, for ev'ry tear that is shed ...there's a reason.
For ev'ry hurt, for ev'ry plight, for every lonely, pain-racked night ...there's a reason.
But, if we trust God, as we should, it will all turn out for our good.
And ...He knows the reason!

May that Almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.