

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, A – July 9, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 785 words

In the heart of the city of Paris there is a beautiful basilica-shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Victories. And in that charming basilica, there are little marble plaques covering almost all of the walls throughout: in the various side chapels, in the main sanctuary area, and even going up the walls of the nave. On the plaques are testimonies of answered prayers – other have pleas for special intentions. These *ex voto* plaques have been left by the poor and the rich, by kings and queens and by commoners – and by people from many different lands. I want to tell you about one plaque, in particular, that made a profound impression on me when I saw it on a visit there.

It was written in Spanish, by someone from Mexico – I'm not sure if it was a man or a woman. And it had two parts. The top section was a testimony “of love and appreciation for a healing that was obtained” through the Blessed Mother’s intercession – dated April 1883. But it seems that shortly after, things took a turn for the worse in that person’s life, for the lower part had a new plea for help. And that was the part that impacted me: it, dated December of that same year – just eight months later – said, “My Mother, I beg you to obtain for me either health or resignation”. Here was a soul that was open to the will of God: if a healing would not be for God’s glory, then he or she wished to be resigned to carry the cross of sickness unto death.

Our Lord speaks to us about resignation in this Sunday’s gospel – though perhaps we do not usually think of it that way. I think we tend to focus more upon his invitation to come to him and find rest. But he says more than that. “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,” he says, “and I will give you rest. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.” What is the Lord’s yoke but the cross? If we think about his journey to Calvary and how Simon of Cyrene helped him to carry the cross, we can easily imagine how one side of the cross beam could be laid on each set of shoulders and carried together, with the vertical beam between them – similar to how a yoke joins two oxen together.

On the way to Calvary, it was Christ who was weak and on the point of expiring from the cruel torture that he had already suffered, and so Simon bore the greater burden in helping him to carry the cross. But now that our Lord is victorious over sin and death and has entered into heavenly glory, he bears the heavier portion of our crosses – that is, when we actually accept to carry them. When he promises to give us rest he does not thereby promise to take away our problems. No, he is offering to help us bear them, if we accept them with meekness and humility, with a spirit of dependence. But how often, when we pray, do we look to escape from our troubles? “Lord, take this away from me! Please save me from it!” He invites us today, instead, to have a spirit of resignation: to embrace the cross and ask him to help carry it; we cannot be saved apart from it! While most of the disciples abandoned him along the way to Calvary, yet he never abandons us on our own way of the cross throughout life!

“My Mother, I beg you to obtain for me either health or resignation”. The person who left that plaque had the same spirit that Our Lord did in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he prayed to his Father, “If possible, let this chalice pass from me; yet not my will, but thine be done.”¹ Christ himself modeled for us a spirit of resignation to the will of God. Whenever you are faced with the cross, or whenever the ongoing crosses of life get heavier, think of that poor Mexican soul that had received a special grace but then had a setback – and hear again the words of Jesus: “Come to me...I will give you rest...take my yoke upon you.” In other words, “do not carry it on your own; do not try to find salvation apart from me; let me help you!” May Our Lady of Victories obtain for each one of us not only resignation to the holy will of God but the grace of perseverance in that will until the very end.

¹ Matthew 26:39.