

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

August 30, 2020

Jeremiah 20:7–9 • Romans 12:1–2 • Matthew 16:21–27

### I.

Another installment of diocesan history during this bicentennial jubilee: the beginning.

It may come as a surprise that the origins of Christianity in Virginia are Catholic and Spanish-speaking, not Protestant and English-speaking.

The first permanent English settlement in North America was founded at Jamestown in 1607.

But 37 years earlier,  
Spanish Jesuits had already come to the same land (1570).

Their missionary expedition, launched 450 years ago next month, brought the Catholic faith to the territory that became Virginia.

There were nine Jesuit missionaries.

The two priests were Father Juan Baptista de Segura, the leader, and Father Luis Francisco de Quirós.

They were joined by three religious brothers:  
Gabriel Gómez, Sancho de Zaballos, and Pedro Mingot de Linares.

In addition, four catechists were part of the group:  
Cristóbal Redondo, Gabriel de Solís, Juan Baptista Méndez,  
and Alonso de Olmos, the youngest member who was also an altar boy.

The Jesuit expedition left the Spanish settlement of Santa Elena—located on present-day Parris Island, South Carolina—on August 5, 1570.

They were bound for a region farther north:  
“Ajacán,” as the indigenous name of the territory sounded to Spanish ears.

On September 10, 1570,  
the Jesuits disembarked near present-day Williamsburg;  
the exact location is unknown.

The missionaries built a shelter farther inland, and for the next five months,  
they struggled to subsist—the area was gripped by famine—  
while trying to convert the local inhabitants.

Within a few a months,  
the Jesuits were deserted by their indigenous guide, who betrayed them.

Between February 4 and 10, 1571,  
the turncoat led members of his Chiskiack tribe in killing the missionaries.

Only the boy, Alonso de Olmos, was spared.

He lived with his captors for over a year before a Spanish military expedition  
rescued him (1572).

The cause for the canonization of the Spanish Jesuit Martyrs of Virginia  
was initiated in 2002, and is ongoing.

## **II.**

“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

As Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI put it,  
the best interpreter of Scripture is the lives of the saints.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus makes the first of three predictions of his passion.

And the apostles are completely unprepared for this announcement—  
not only that Jesus will have to suffer,  
but that they will too.

St. Peter, who last week who uttered that divinely revealed profession of faith,  
now foists his own, human expectations on Jesus,  
earning a stinging reprimand:

“Get behind me, Satan!”

Jesus predicts his suffering—and explains that this is a way of life for his disciples:

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross,  
and follow me.”

The cross need not be physical;  
as we know, life brings many kinds of difficulties.

But followers of Christ bear with suffering differently.

They know that the Master is with them,  
and that suffering is not the end.

It is a portal to resurrection—a new kind of life now, filled with meaning,  
and the future resurrection of the body.

In the last two weeks,  
the parish has been blessed with two First Holy Communion of children.

As a priest, these are among my proudest and happiest days,  
because those children, young as they are,  
will remember that special day for the rest of their lives,  
just as we remember our First Holy Communion.

The children remind us of the greatness and majesty of the Most Holy Eucharist,  
and what it means for our lives.

The Eucharist is the very life of God  
that empowers us to lead the Gospel way of life.

That is why we go to Mass;  
that is why Mass is so important;  
that is why the Mass is the source and pinnacle of everything else  
that the Church does.

The Mass renews—  
it makes present—  
the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We are drawn into that sacrifice, that event of our salvation.

The culmination of Mass is our receiving the sacrificial victim:  
Jesus Christ—body, blood, soul and divinity.

That is why we fast from bodily food,  
and examine our conscience,  
before approaching.

That is why we receive the Eucharist with the greatest reverence.

All of this means that the Mass is not just a communal gathering or prayer;  
it's far more profound than that.

The Mass is God's drawing us together—as the Church—  
to experience his Son's death and resurrection.

That is a power that flows into our lives;  
that is the power to live the Gospel out there,  
dying and rising with Christ in our everyday lives.

Recently,  
we've been recording parishioners' testimony about why they go to Mass,  
which we then distribute via Flocknotes.

The testimony I've heard has been edifying—thank you for that.

That witness is part of the ongoing transmission of the faith.

In a sense, it reaches all the way back to those Jesuit missionaries  
who brought the Catholic faith to Virginia,  
and who gave away their lives in testimony to it.

While here in Virginia for those five months, they regularly celebrated Mass,  
renewing the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

In the words of the great St. Augustine of Hippo, whose feast was Friday,  
they “became what they received.”

That is a compelling witness to the Gospel way of life,  
and to the Eucharist that makes it possible.