

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

July 4, 2021

Ezekiel 2:2–5 • 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 • Mark 6:1–6

I.

Back in March,
the children of the parish received the Sacrament of Penance for the first time,
in preparation for their First Holy Communion.

The format of this First Penance was a communal celebration
with individual confessions.

It was Lent,
which is an especially fitting season for the Sacrament of Penance.

The night before First Penance,
many parishioners were in the church for the Stations of the Cross.

I was struck—and I told this to the children and their parents the next day—
that right outside the door where I would be hearing confessions
was the sixth station of the Cross:
Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

There, in the confessional,
we come face to face with Christ.

We understand, in personal and profound way,
that he suffered to forgive our sins.

And there we experience Jesus' mercy and friendship,
as when he left an imprint of his face on Veronica's cloth.

The Stations of the Cross form a hall of mirrors;
we're meant to see a reflection of lives in each of them.

After all,
the Way of the Cross, including the Resurrection, is the life of a Christian.

II.

In the Second Reading,

St. Paul explains how he shares in the death and resurrection of Christ:

“I will... boast most gladly of my weaknesses,
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. ...
for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Jesus’ death and resurrection—
the source of our salvation—
is a paradox.

The Son of God saves us by himself suffering.

His surrender to God’s plan brings about a victory.

Christ chooses to be weak by worldly standards,
so that God can him strong—invincible—in the resurrection from the dead.

Each Christian is baptized—
the word “baptism” means “immersion”—
into Christ’s death and resurrection.

That event—the Way of the Cross and the Resurrection—
becomes the pattern of our lives.

In each celebration of the Mass,
Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross is renewed;
here, we are drawn into his death and resurrection.

The Sacrament of Penance also renews this “paschal mystery”
for the forgiveness of our sins,
especially our grave sins.

But the paschal mystery has its own logic,
which reverses the normal, human way of understanding weakness and strength,
failure and victory.

This is what St. Paul has come to understand:

“A thorn in the flesh was given to me,
 an angel of Satan, to beat me,
 to keep me from being too elated.
 Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,
 but he said to me,
 ‘My grace is sufficient for you,
 for power is made perfect in weakness.’”

When we understand and appreciate the paradox of the Cross,
 we unleash its power transform our lives, as it did St. Paul’s.

God acts differently than we do;
 he confounds our expectations.

What we regard as weak,
 God uses to demonstrate his strength.

When we choose to become “weak,”
 in the sense of accepting our failures and admitting our sins,
 then God takes center stage

When we surrender,
 God’s strength becomes our power.

“Therefore,” declares St. Paul,

“I am content with weaknesses, insults,
 hardships, persecutions, and constraints,
 for the sake of Christ;
 for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Our weakness and difficulties—
 as individual persons, as a Church, and as a society—
 keep us from accomplishing all that we would like to.

In a sense, even Jesus’ paschal mystery was “incomplete.”

Of course, Christ’s death and resurrection was decisive.

But he wanted the Church to continue his work by preaching the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments—for the rest of the world, and throughout the centuries.

We continue that work in our own lives.

This weekend, the 4th of July, the United States turns 245 years old.

Reflecting on the tumultuous events of the past year-and-a-half, which includes widespread political polarization, the civic unrest resulting from racial injustice that erupted last summer, and the storming of US Capitol in January, it's plain that the promise of the Declaration of Independence has not yet been entirely fulfilled.

Our country has fallen short of its ideals, but that doesn't mean that the ideals are illusion, or that great things haven't been accomplished—they have.

But there's more work to be done.

In this regard, Christians, including Catholics, have an important role to play.

Lay men and women are a “leaven” for society, as the Second Vatican Council taught (see *Lumen gentium*, no. 31).

By acknowledging our shortcomings and failures as a society, and by repenting of the social sins that harm so many people—from the scourge of abortion to the plague of racism—we come closer to fulfilling the threefold promise of our founding: “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Two days before Independence Day, the Church commemorates the feast of St. Junípero Serra (1713–1784).

He was Franciscan friar of the 1700s who brought the Gospel to California, and who defended indigenous people against the excesses of the Spanish Empire.

Pope Francis canonized Fr. Serra in 2015 during his visit to the United States; it was the first canonization on American soil.

Fr. Serra suffered physical ailments throughout his life, but it didn't keep him from walking hundreds of miles to proclaim the Gospel.

He lived according to his beautiful motto:
in Spanish, *siempre adelante*—"keep moving forward!"

Keep moving forward along the way of the Cross and Resurrection.

Keep moving forward, as a country, toward a "more perfect union."

Keep moving forward, as disciples, toward Jesus Christ.