

**Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent  
Knights of Columbus Council 1580**

**March 18, 2018**

**Saint Paul Parish  
Highland, Illinois**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, brother Knights, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we continue our Lenten journey, drawing ever nearer to Holy Week, in which we celebrate the sacred mysteries of our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection.

By way of introduction, I wish to tell you about a rather unusual group activity, in which the participants scaled an outdoor rock wall at night and found themselves standing on a small platform that swayed in the wind forty feet in the air under a starry sky. Some of them climbed nimbly with minimal assistance from the spotters. Others tired in the ascent and were held in place in their harnesses to rest a bit until they could climb some more. Still others were hoisted none too gracefully the last few feet over the top edge. But they were petrified, because the only way down was on a zipline into the darkness.

While this may sound like some sort of exercise on a ninja warrior television show, it was not. Rather, it was an activity at a camp for grieving families who had experienced the death of a child. Each participant was experiencing an overwhelming sense of grief and, together, they were trying to make sense of their loss and regain control over their lives.

After the rock climbing and zipline exercise, the families gathered around a fire to reflect on their experiences. This group of fathers, mothers and siblings, previously strangers, were brought together and formed a community due to having suffered the loss of a child in their families. Until then, each had been trying to deal with his or her loss individually. But through their participation in this camp, together they learned how, once again, to separate the distractions that surrounded them from their thoughts, so that they might listen to our Lord and allow Him to fill their hearts and lives with comfort.

During the time spent reflecting on their experience, one teen said that jumping off the wall and trusting the zipline to carry her to a soft landing gave her the courage to enter the darkness of her grief following her brother's death. A dad noted that he was unable to climb the wall on his own strength, but that the help from the spotters and the shouts of

encouragement from the group helped him do it. He now realized that he needed companions on the journey through paralyzing grief or he would get stuck there alone. One mom said that she was still too sad to talk about her struggle as she could not put it into words. After a few moments of silence, her young son said, "Yes, Mom, you're not ready yet. But we'll be here when you are."

While we may or may not at this time be experiencing the sort of grief described in this story, each of us has experienced some sort of grief, loss or suffering at some point in our lives. Whether it is favorite things that get broken, teams we do not make, jobs we do not get, dreams delayed or abandoned, broken relationships, or the death of a loved one, we all have suffered in some way. But each of these circumstances in which we experience loss provides us with an opportunity to die to ourselves and our will so that God might transform our lives.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we prepare to enter into Jesus' passion and death during Holy week, the question that we must ask ourselves is whether we, like the people in the story, are ready to allow God to break through whatever is holding us back in order to live ever

more faithfully as His disciples both as a community of faith and as individual believers.

Our readings today point out two very important aspects of the spiritual life that I hope will help us break through the barriers that keep us from living as Christ's disciples. In our Gospel today, we hear a recounting of the events leading up to the passion and death of our Lord, in which Jesus clearly could have chosen to avoid the suffering that He was about to endure. But rather than avoiding it, He embraced the suffering in order to fulfil His salvific mission. May we learn from our Lord and embrace the moments of suffering that we encounter throughout our lives, uniting them to His suffering on the Cross, so that they might be occasions of grace and lead us into a deeper relationship with Him.

In our first reading, the prophet Jeremiah remembers how, as they became more self-reliant and prosperous, the Israelite people had forgotten the original blessing that God established with them. In fact, they went so far as to place their faith in other gods. But, God in His loving providence does not reject them or give up on them. Quite the contrary, He desires to wipe clean the slate and enter into a new covenant with them. So too does

our Lord stand ready today to restore us and to write his law of love on our hearts.

In these last days of Lent, let us redouble our efforts to die to ourselves so that we might grow as Christ's disciples. May our fasting and penance prepare us to experience, with our Lord, the suffering and death that He endured for our salvation.

May God give us this grace. Amen.