

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2026

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran Minister who was put to death by the Nazis during WWII. Before his death, he wrote a book entitled, “The Cost of Discipleship.” In his book, he made a sharp distinction between “cheap grace” and “costly grace.” Cheap grace is whenever we seek God’s forgiveness without making ongoing attempts to repent and change our ways. We desire the blessings and graces of God without embracing the call to daily discipleship and conversion. We want a faith that does not demand anything of us or cost us anything.

Naturally, costly grace is the opposite. As we pray during the distribution of the ashes on Ash Wednesday, we continually seek to “Turn away from the sin and be faithful to the Gospel. This approach to faith demands something of us. It costs us something. It is the cost of daily dying to ourselves so that we become more faithful to Jesus Christ and a living image of Him. It is the cost that comes from possibly losing the esteem of others, our good reputation, our social status, our personal comfort, our peace of mind, our physical health, and

even our lives, for the sake of Jesus Christ and our Catholic Christian faith.

We are surrounded by a cultural atmosphere that delights in “cheap grace” but runs from and even rejects “costly grace.” Are we personally affected with the “cheap grace” mentality? The struggle is quite understandable, but Jesus makes it abundantly clear in our Gospel reading, that embracing costly grace is an absolute necessity in the Christian life: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

This reveals that the heart and soul of our Christian faith is SACRIFICIAL LOVE. Jesus revealed this truth through his own life and ministry. Sacrificial love compelled him to share in our humanity. He experienced the various blessings and crosses of human existence. He gave generously and tirelessly of Himself in ministering to others. He experienced suffering and death. And He did it all FOR US. That is why Jesus proclaimed: “There is no greater love then to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” These words are not a pious platitude, because Jesus literally lived them out to the nth degree.

We are called to do the same, whatever that may look like and feel like for us. So how are we doing with sacrificial love when it comes to our relationship with God? Are we willing to pray daily and actively participate in Sunday Eucharist even if we don't feel like it or it is inconvenient? Are we willing to create a faith-filled environment in our homes? Are we willing to seriously strive to do the will of God in matters great and small? Are we willing to be a good Christian example for other people? Are we willing to suffer ridicule and rejection for Jesus Christ and our Catholic Christian faith? Are we willing to take a stand on the burning issues of our time? I am talking about the issues of the dignity of life from the womb to the tomb; discrimination in its various manifestations; and our understanding of sexuality, marriage, family, and gender identity. These issues are presently front and center in our culture and they are battling for our individual and collective minds, hearts, and souls.

The issue is whether we will understand and embrace them from a faith-filled or secular mindset? If we choose to embrace them from a Catholic Christian perspective, we will experience firsthand, the reality of "costly grace." Since we live in a cancel culture, someone may even

cancel us from their lives. Are we up for it? Are we willing to embrace the truth? Are we willing to put ourselves on the line for the sake of the Gospel?

The sacrificial love that is the foundation of our Christian faith does not just apply to our relationship with God. It also applies to our relationship with other people. This is beautifully illustrated in the movie “Hacksaw Ridge” which is based on a true story. Desmond Doss loved his country and felt called by God to serve in the military. The only problem is that because of his faith, he was a Jehovah Witness, he did not believe in using a weapon to take the life of another person. He was continually harassed by military officials and his fellow soldiers for this conviction. He held fast to it and faithfully served his country as a Medic. During the battle of Hacksaw Ridge in World War II, he saved 75 of his fellow soldiers in the midst of a fierce battle with the Japanese, without ever raising a weapon. In my opinion, that is some serious sacrificial love, especially when you consider that these were the same soldiers who relentlessly mocked him for his beliefs.

We may never be called to the same level of heroic sacrificial love, but every day provides us with the opportunity to exercise some. Sometimes it may even

rise to the level of heroism. Are we willing to embrace those daily opportunities to show sacrificial love to our family, friends, those we serve, and the people we encounter on any given day? More specifically, are we willing to make time for our family? Are we willing to take care of our sick and elderly parents? Are we willing to help with the chores and our fair share of the household responsibilities? In a special way, are we willing to display sacrificial love toward the forgotten, outcast, sick and suffering, less fortunate, or the underdog? By seizing these opportunities, we truly embrace “costly grace.” It cost us something. It may cost us our time, talent, energy, leisure, entertainment, comfort zone, and/or personal preferences. Keep in mind, even if we do it with a less than ideal disposition, we still receive God’s grace and are a channel of grace for those we have sacrificially loved and served. Maybe with enough practice, we will increasingly do it with a joyful and cheerful heart, as it becomes part of our character. The habit of sacrificial love has an enriching and transforming power in our relationships with God, others, and ourselves.

As we prepare to receive the One who sacrificed everything for us and our salvation, let us pray that He

will renew our hearts so that we grow in our capacity for a sacrificial love that flows from the deepest depths of our souls.