

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have finally made it through Lent into the glorious season of Easter. I would like to share some of my own experiences this Lent. This year, Lent has been rather grueling for me. The call to heightened fasting, prayer and almsgiving can leave me discouraged in my weakness and inconstancy.

There was a day this Lent that, in the midst of examining my complete failure at fasting, I got discouraged and despondent. So many times I felt myself left wanting and weak. Ever feel that way? I know Jesus told St. Faustina that **“the greatest obstacles to holiness are discouragement and an exaggerated anxiety. These will deprive you of the ability to practice virtue”** (*Diary* 1488). Yet, so often in the midst of “life” I forget this. Looking back, I realize that it was from inappropriate self-love – I was more upset (subconsciously) that *I* had failed, than that I had not given the gift of my fast to Jesus. You know, I think this is what God has been trying to teach me: that I focus too much on myself, on my devotions, on my prayer, on my work as a priest, and not enough on God Himself.

In that moment of discouragement and despondency, the Lord put it on my heart that I was to spend more time just gazing upon His Holy Face. I have been consecrated to the Holy Face of Jesus, yet, in the craziness of ministerial life, I lost focus, I forget that we are sometimes just called to look with love upon Jesus. You see, I had been feeling this malaise for a while. I had felt the loss of love for the Lord as I tended in my prayer time to focus more on “doing” and less on “being.” Yet, it is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees to spend all of our time doing external actions which have no love. As St. Paul says, even if I handed my body over for martyrdom, but have not love, I gain nothing (see I Corinthians 13:3). At the heart of all our devotions must be... well... *devotion, love*. At the heart of our ministerial work must be love. Everything must revolve around love of God. St. Thérèse’s definition of remaining a little child before God touched me again:

**It is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father; it is to be disquieted about nothing, and not to be set on gaining our living. Even among the poor, they give the child what is necessary, but as soon as he grows up, his father no longer wants to feed him and says: ‘Work now, you can take care of yourself.’**

**It was so as not to hear this that I never wanted to grow up, feeling that I was incapable of making my living, the eternal life of heaven. I’ve always remained little, therefore, having no other occupation but to gather flowers, the flowers of love and sacrifice, and of offering them to God in order to please Him.**

**To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of anything, but to recognize that God places this treasure in the hands of His little child to be used when necessary; but it remains always God’s treasure. Finally, it is not to become discouraged over one’s faults, for children fall often, but they are too little to hurt themselves very much.** (St. Therese of Lisieux, “The Yellow Notebook, 6 August 1897” *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations*)

I have gone back to this over and over throughout my priesthood, and it always remains fresh. I forget too often to gather flowers, flowers of love and sacrifice! Why is it that I think I have to earn God’s respect and love for my work in His Kingdom?! He’s done it *all* already! I just have to love Him. Yet my fasts become an attempt at showing God (well... really myself) how strong I am, how dedicated I am, how holy I am... and in the end they end up showing just the opposite! I am NOT strong. I am NOT dedicated. I am NOT holy. And as long as I do everything for myself and not to gather flowers to *delight* our Lord, I will never attain holiness.

What was I saying? Oh yes, the devotion to the Holy Face. Over the last few weeks, I have found extraordinary grace in just spending time gazing upon Our Lord’s Face. So present in His Holy Face is the pain He felt by all of the brutality; yet He chose to be brutalized for me. His Face is full of the agony of being betrayed, denied and abandoned; yet He would never choose the easier path of indifference or stoicism. And I am the one who brutalizes Him, I am the one who abandons, denies and betrays Him with each sin – and He still chooses to love me! How can I *not* love Him more when I spend so much time looking at His infinite love for me?! I have begun to grow in that love again, spending time with Him *just to spend time with Him!* Isn’t this what it’s all about?!

And so we enter into the Easter Season. The *Alleluias* and “Glory to God in the Highest” bid us to gaze upon the glorious Face of Christ! Next Sunday – Divine Mercy Sunday – reminds me that love covers a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8) ... and weakness, and inconstancy. It reminds me that my life is not about me, and that I am *not* called to excel, but *to trust* in God and His love (“O Blood and water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You” *Diary* 84, 187). After all, **“The cause of your falls is that you rely too much upon yourself and too little on me,”** as Jesus told St. Faustina, but He continues, **“let this not sadden you so much. You are dealing with the God of mercy”** (*Diary* 1488). All that I struggled to do led to my falls because I relied on myself, not God. But God’s other name is mercy! Which I desperately need!

May this holy season draw you to a deeper trust in God’s infinite mercy, and a greater love of Him in *all things!*

**Happy Easter!**