

Mission



Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,
Happy **14th Sunday in Ordinary Time** and **Independence Day** as we celebrate our nation's 245th birthday!

For today's celebration of Independence, this weekend's readings seem very appropriate. Today St. Paul tells us that he knows what it means to suffer and to be humiliated. He had received a *"thorn in his flesh."* We don't know exactly what it was, perhaps some chronic illness or a temptation that kept tormenting him. Although he begged the Lord to take it away, St. Paul realized that it had a purpose. The Lord allowed Satan to *"beat"* him so that he would come to depend totally on God's grace. St. Paul saw an advantage in his suffering.

Jesus also suffered and was humiliated. We see an instance in today's Gospel. It was not an attack on his flesh, but something more common - an insult, a put down from his own townsmen. He had already begun his ministry of preaching, healing and casting out demons. He then did something which required some courage. He returned to home base. They knew his mother, his *"brothers" and "sisters,"* that is, his close relatives, probably cousins. When Jesus preached, they first listened with amazement, but then something changed. They started asking, *"Isn't he the carpenter? He doesn't have a title. Who does he think he is?"*

And how did Jesus react to this put down? Well, very different than many of us. When someone rejects us, often we feel discouraged. It was not that way with Jesus. He kept his head high. He put the rejection in context. Yes, I am a carpenter, but I am also a prophet. And no prophet is well received in his own country. He did what he could - a few healings, which is something - but then he went on to other towns.

If someone has a mission, he can put up with a lot. I would like to give you an example from one of our immigrant groups - the Italians. Every group of immigrants has their particular genius, their goal. For the Italians, they came to this country with a clear purpose: to earn and save money. They were mainly young men from southern Italy who wanted to save enough money to buy a piece of land and to help their parents. They accepted the hardest jobs and worked long hours. They would typically share a room among four or five guys. For entertainment, they played soccer on Sunday, and they went to Mass. The natives, as you might imagine, looked down on them, sometimes with strong insults. But the Italians basically ignored them. They had their goal and were not going to be distracted. A fellow Italian, Amadeo Gianini, recognized the particular character of his countrymen. He opened a bank for them - the Bank of Italy. It spread from San Francisco across the country and became one of the biggest financial institutions in the country. It is now known not as the Bank of Italy, but the Bank of America. It is a testimony to the dreams and hard work of young Italian immigrants.

When people have a dream, they do not let others discourage them. We also have a goal, not so much to save money - although that is part of it. Our goal is deeper: to form families of faith for the salvation of souls. We have the example of St. Paul, of Jesus - and even those Italian immigrants. That example encourages us to make sacrifices and - if I can say it this way - to put up with put downs. St. Paul says, *"I am content with weakness, insults and hardships...for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Have a Blessed Independence Day Week!

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