



Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate **the Ascension**: Jesus suffers for us on the cross, he dies and then rises; he shows himself to the disciples and finally takes his place at the right hand of the Father. The letter to Hebrews sums up this process with these words: "He opened the way for us."

Jesus opens the way for us. He does it first by suffering. Sometimes people say that Jesus suffered so that we don't have to suffer. That is not the case. It is true that none of us can pay the price for our sins (it would be like me trying to pay off the national debt on my own). Only Jesus can pay back our debt. But he did not suffer to take away our suffering. He did it so that our suffering would have meaning.

People ask me why they have to suffer such horrible things. I have to admit that I hedge my bets, "Oh, things will get better; I will pray for you." And I mean it. St. Paul, however, was more direct. He says, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom is where Jesus is: By his Ascension, his return to the Father's right hand, Jesus has opened the way to the kingdom. In him our trials have meaning.

I think of St. Jose Luis Sanchez Del Rio canonized by Pope Francis on October 16, 2016. Maybe you saw him in the movie, "For Greater Glory." He was the boy the federales captured. The fourteen-year-old impressed them so much that they offered him a chance for the military academy in Mexico City. All he had to do was say, "Long live the government. Down with Christ the King." Jose Luis replied, "Viva Cristo Rey! Long live Christ the King!" The officer became so furious that he subjected the boy to a cruel torture - cutting off the soles of his feet and forcing him to walk to the cemetery. Through his tears, he kept whispering, "Viva Cristo Rey." The guard struck him with a machete, causing him to bleed. At the graveside the officer said he could save his life: only say, "Long live the government." The boy paused, then breathed, "Viva Cristo Rey." That was his last breath.

Someone might say, "What a terrible waste." That boy could have had a long and productive life. But, you know, even if he lived a hundred years, his life would now be over. (He was born on March 28, 1913.)

We live in an age that says, "You can have it all." That's a deceptive slogan. The devil has used it to bring misery to many people. They tried to have it all, but one day they realized they missed the one thing their heart wanted.

Still, the slogan is not completely false. There is a sense in which you can have it all: By giving everything to Jesus. Say to him, "I will accept whatever hardship, whatever trial you send." Give it all to Jesus. You cannot keep those things anyway. Jesus in turn will give you the things you can never lose. You can have it all.

St. Jose Luis Sanchez showed us that. Even though he was only an adolescent, he saw the truth. In Jesus alone can we have it all. In him we have what lasts. Jesus has opened the way for us.

Have a Blessed Ascension of the Lord Sunday!

Rev. Rafal Ligenza

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