



Dear friends,

As always, I hope this finds you well and blessed as we transition from summer into fall. The first day of autumn is this coming Wednesday, which seems just about perfect as we enjoy the return of Washington showers (or at least, I do!).

“The martyrdom of the Virgin is set forth both in the prophecy of Simeon and in the actual story of our Lord’s passion. The holy old man said of the infant Jesus: He has been established as a sign which will be contradicted. He went on to say to Mary: And your own heart will be pierced by a sword.”

“Do not be surprised, brothers, that Mary is said to be a martyr in spirit. Let him be surprised who does not remember the words of Paul, that one of the greatest crimes of the Gentiles was that they were without love. That was far from the heart of Mary; let it be far from her servants.”

St. Bernard, Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows (Sept. 15), Office of Readings

Today’s letter is not about updates at the parish or changes from the archdiocesan and state. I would like this to be more of an approach to you on a personal level. Short of visiting with each of you personally after Masses or coming to your homes - things in which I delight whenever the opportunity presents itself! - I hope to take this opportunity to open my heart to you and, perhaps, speak to yours.

Before anything else, please know that you are not alone in feeling the heaviness of all that is going on. The weight of it all seems to make itself known at regular intervals - I find that the hardest days for me tend to be on Monday mornings and at Saturday evening Mass, which mark the beginning of my week and weekends respectively. Perhaps you’ve noticed your own cycle of ups and downs on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Sometimes it is simply a matter of lacking enthusiasm for a moment, other times it takes great effort to keep from weeping openly.

I highlight this because I want to emphasize a simple but profound truth: **you are not alone in your suffering**. Our roles are different, with varying understanding, perspectives, and approaches, but we remain united in both faith and experiences. We are not only together as Catholics, but we are enduring the trials of our current circumstances together, as a people united.

Last week I was on vacation with six friends in the woods. Only two of us are practicing Catholics, though a couple others share some faith in Christ. All are fairly opinionated in matters theological, political, and personal. As you might imagine, we formed quite the motley crew as we discussed, debated, and otherwise solved the problems of the world! I am happy to report that these improbable friendships not only survived but grew stronger over our six days together.

During that time, I also joined in a virtual meeting with Archbishop Etienne and my brother priests. Unlike my group of friends in that remote house in the woods, all of us on the call were practicing Catholics and, priests to boot! But there was great diversity even in that gathering. As



# WHY DO CATHOLICS DO THAT?

- Father Jacob Maurer

Archbishop Etienne closed our meeting with a passage from scripture that he had chosen for reflection. I don't remember which chapter and verse he had selected - something from Saint Paul, I think - but the change in his demeanor touched me greatly. As he started to read, it was clear that he was deeply emotional, only just getting through the words he was saying aloud.

One of the temptations of the devil is the urge to approach a person in terms of their words, actions, or simply our perception of them. Despite knowing that each individual is a mysterious combination of personality, experiences, culture, and beliefs, we can reduce them to a statement, a position, or another caricature. When we do so, we are usually just a short distance away from dismissing them - and absolving ourselves of any responsibility to know and love them.

Despite being a priest and a pastor, I would be lying if I pretended that this temptation is not present in my own heart - even (especially!) in ministry. I have a multitude of excuses, especially when I feel wounded, lonely, or sorrowful. I have felt this temptation in relation to our archbishop, my brother priests, my family, my friends, even towards our community, as a whole or individually.

Last week, I found that that hardness of heart could not withstand even a brief moment of vulnerability, offered to me and my brother priests by our archbishop. I don't know if he intended or realized the value of the gift he had given us, but I have been thinking about it since. The Church has often spoken about the gift of tears, usually in the context of how our own sorrow can be a blessing. I had not fully recognized how precious is the offering of someone else's tears.

I wish I could promise you this gift, but I struggle with even the idea of being so openly emotional. But I want you to know that I have and do feel for and with you, sometimes to the point of tears, albeit privately. In those moments when others have given that gift to me, I have felt profoundly honored and grateful for the vulnerability entrusted to my care.

Maybe that's the takeaway, that we need to be willing to look past simple words, actions, and our perceptions of each other. Though those things matter, they tell a part - not the whole - of the story. It may be that the kindest thing we can do is to be willing to accept everything about the person in front of us - and likewise offer ourselves as much as we can, especially the messy parts. Jesus reminds us that suffering is unavoidable in this life - but that the path to unity with Him and with each other is in being willing to suffer wholeheartedly together.

I pray for you daily, and I invite you to join me in praying daily for our community. And as best I can, I am with you in all of this. Together in Christ, great fruit will be brought from our sharing in this portion of His Passion and cross. May God help us do so well.

- Father Maurer