

August 21, 2016 The Lords Discipline Homily:

Brothers and sisters, early in my life as a collegian at St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vermont, I was forewarned by upper class students to avoid enrolling in any courses taught by one Professor McDonald, a philosophy teacher of longstanding. Naturally, I asked why. Their responses are worth noting. "He's too demanding", "He expects too much of this students", and worst of all, "He seldom gives an "A" grade to any of his students". I was then advised to enroll in so-called "gut" courses taught by teachers who habitually gave out an "A" grade to students in the class even though few demands were made of them. A few years later, the year of my graduation in 1976, I was told by one of the priests on campus, that whenever graduates return to the school for a reunion, the first teacher they wish to thank is none other than Dr. McDonald. I was momentarily startled. "Why?" I asked. "My understanding is that he was loathed by the students," Certainly not all the students", replied the priest. " Many came to appreciate him as one who insisted on getting the most out of his students and preparing them for the challenges awaiting them following graduation. He proved to be a true mentor and friend of students. His love of wisdom had a most salutary effect."

In our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, the anonymous author exhorts his readers not to disdain the discipline of the Lord. (Heb.12:5) "For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines." Further, "All discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain... yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained for it." (Heb.12:11) Interestingly, the English word "discipline" is derived from the Latin word "disciplius", meaning "learner". It is also associated with another English word, "disciple". In the very same letter we reflect upon today at Mass, there is a mysterious reference to Christ who, we are told, "learned obedience from what he suffered."(Heb. 5:8)

In one commentary I consulted, the author writes the following: "The author [of the Letter to the Hebrews] is concerned with God, our relationship to the Father and the instruction he gives us. The pain and trials of life are part of our education under him and clearly not imposed arbitrarily, but for our own good".

In truth, any trials we undergo in this life of pilgrimage are a testimony of God's parental love. Divine discipline is a necessary instrument in forming our Christian character and contributes to our growth as disciples of Jesus. In addition, it prepares us for the call to martyrdom.

Only recently the Summer Olympic Games ended in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Perhaps one of the unsung heroes of the games is the one who labors anonymously, oftentimes beyond the view of the spectator: the coach and personal trainer of the Olympic athlete. Just consider his role in training, say, a marathon runner. The athlete must be prepared to endure much pain and suffering in view of the triumphant end of the race, and the rarest of all opportunities to earn a medal in competition. The coach may be fearsome, too demanding and sometimes, even unfair. But, in the end, his discipline may be the reason for the athlete's victory!

Permit me to quote the title of one of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's works, "Training in Christianity". Dear friends, we are in training each and every day of our Life. Would I be unfair in calling Our Eternal Father "our personal trainer"? Do we dare to reject the "discipline of the Lord"? Can we discern the plan of God for each one of us?

Are the expectations God has for us onerous, unrealistic, and impossible? In our thoughts do we complain that God is "too demanding"? How blest is the Christian who accepts in faith "Divine discipline"!

Amen.