

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 C

I wrote this homily before the events of the last few days in Ukraine, but I hope they can have some meaning as we join in prayer for peace and for relief of the human suffering that war and violence bring. Every experience enters our memory and shapes us, even if we have no clear recollection of it. Research into Alzheimer's disease suggests that when we remember something, we do not simply play the same tape, over and over. *Rather, every remembrance creates a new memory path, so that what we think about often becomes most enduring in our minds ... a larger storehouse of neural connections, as it were, so by sheer volume, these things remain longer in our minds.* What most often enters our brains meaningfully and is etched there by repetition has a strong influence in shaping our character and personality – the kind of fruit we are likely to bear, as Jesus puts it. *As world events show, the greater our power over the lives of others, the more responsibility we have for the fruits of who we have become.*

If he had lived in our day, Inigo Lopez would have been a high-school junior when he became a soldier for hire in his native Spain. Wealthy, skilled with the sword, and with a strong sense of entitlement, he sought fame and glory and felt invincible. Just a year later, his leg was shattered by a stray cannonball and he returned to the family castle, his military career over at age 18. During his long recovery, the few books of adventure his friends brought were soon exhausted. Bored, he turned to the handful of other reading available – the Bible and the lives of the saints. Gradually, he realized that while he enjoyed reading those tales of war, they left no lasting happiness; they thrilled him in the moment but left him empty. Yet reading about the saints stayed with him and called forth his better nature. To pursue the things of God – slowly, he came to think of this as the far greater challenge, with the promise of a glory that would not fade away.

You perhaps recognize by now that Inigo is better known to us as St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Those months of forced bedrest bore fruit in their order's motto: *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*: all

for the greater glory of God. It's easy to say and inspiring to ponder, but it becomes real only with daily choices to align our thoughts and deeds to the mind of Jesus, and not seek our glory in things that seem important but soon pass away.

The 16th century world of St. Ignatius did not have cell phones. There was no Internet, no 24/7 news cycle, no bloggers or apps. Yet then as now, many voices call us to follow, to give our allegiance to this or that idea or cause or purpose. ***We each choose our teachers, the people we allow to form our attitudes and habits.*** Among the loudest voices today are those who point fingers, find fault, plant doubts and assert a kingdom of the self. By contrast, Jesus invites us to carry the Cross with love, to serve with mercy, to trust with patience. When fully trained, we will be like Him, and that means in part that we will have some scars earned through sacrifices we have made for another. To those of you who do this so faithfully, quietly, and humbly ... thank you.

Of all the words that wash over us, our distractions and our worries and our responsibilities, ***today I invite you to remember the words God has spoken to your heart.*** It might be a passage of Scripture; maybe an insight from personal prayer; maybe something another person said that sticks with you to inspire, to console, to guide. Human words pass away, but the Word that we receive from God does not pass away and always bears good fruit when we allow it to take root. ***Cherish those words above all others.***

At the heart of the Eucharist are the words of Jesus: "Do this in memory of Me." The sufferings of the world find their healing in that Gift of the Redeemer's love and our willingness to love in the way He does. As He comes to us today, our Amen can be spoken with the invitation: ***Jesus, my Teacher, make me more like You.***