

No pain, no gain. There is a ring of truth to this expression. If we want to succeed in anything, effort and sacrifice are necessary. This maxim is often applied to sport and the necessary discipline and long hours of training that are often involved. But it can equally be applied to spirituality. If our faith is important, then effort and discipline are necessary.

In today's gospel Jesus declares: "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains a single gain" (John 12.24).

Jesus gave his life for us. And it came at a great price. His impending death weighed heavily upon his heart. "Now my soul is heavy", exclaims Jesus. But Jesus does not turn aside from his mission. The hour has come for him to be glorified and when he is lifted up upon the cross he becomes the life and salvation of all the world.

This passing over from death to life is painful. Yet all of us must make this passing many times during our lifetime. We die to the comfort and protection of the womb to emerge into the world. We die to innocence of childhood to enter into the sexual awakening of adolescence. We die to the flower of our youth in order to move into the generativity of mid-life. Finally, there is death itself, where we pass from this life into eternity. In each case our horizons are expanded. Through our many 'deaths' we do not diminish but paradoxically become more.

By trying to hold on to life the opposite is true, for we become constricted and small. As Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador (an outspoken critic of the oppressive government of his time and who was gunned down while celebrating Mass in 1980) puts it:

To each one of us Christ is saying: If you want your life and mission to be fruitful like mine, do as I. Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried. Let yourself be killed. Do not be afraid. Those who shun suffering will remain alone. No one is more alone than the selfish. But if you give your life out of love for others, as I give mine for all, you will reap a great harvest.

***Peace and blessings,
Gerard***