

Homily
The Feast of the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome
June 30, 2023

“Be careful what you wish for” is a famous quote and sentiment from Aesop’s Fables.

I wish I were a better golfer – but then I would probably spend more time and money on the course and away from my family and from the Parish.

I wish I were rich – then I would probably be too focused on the material things of this world instead of those treasures I’m struggling to store in heaven.

I wish that some of those challenges I experienced in my youth didn’t happen – then I wouldn’t be the person I am today, as terrible as some of those things were, many my own fault.

We are commanded to, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing.” The Responsorial Psalm says, “See how the Lord blesses those who fear Him.” We do this first by believing in Him, acknowledging His Divinity and obeying Him. The leper in our Gospel today worshiped Jesus and then made his petition – to be made clean. Jesus willed it so. In the first reading, Abraham begs God to let Ishmael live; God not only let’s Ishmael live but blesses him and makes him fertile. God has a plan.

Jesus answers our prayers, even if we believe He doesn’t give us what we want or believe He doesn’t even listen. He always listens and He always answers! And those answers are for the good of the whole church.

When we align our will to God’s Will, we pray for what is good and what makes the Body of Christ whole. Sometimes, the answer is hard to take because it causes us discomfort. Sometimes the answer is, “No.” And we trust in God’s wisdom and are grateful for His answer.

Today we remember and celebrate the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome. This includes Peter and Paul, who’s Solemnity we celebrated yesterday. Nero, Emperor of Rome from 54 to 68 AD, blamed the Christians for a fire he most likely set himself. He used these Christians as a scapegoat and had them horrendously tortured and murdered. They were martyred for the glory of God and have received their martyrs’ crown in their triumph in heaven.

We can ask God for anything, and we should. But let’s be careful what we ask for; He may just give us what we need. My greatest fear is that God will give me just what I need, because it will cause me to stretch and grow in my faith. Painful, but a good thing. Every good thing God has given me has caused me great joy and, very often, growing pains.

Should we pray for a martyr’s death? Yes, but, if you’re like me, on our own terms. And God will just laugh, pat us on the head and say, “Hang on; this is going to be a bumpy ride.”