

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” With these powerful words, our Lord Jesus gives us the heavenly formula for authentic happiness, freedom, and holiness. Our Lord’s statement here really constitutes a “paradox.” Now what is a “paradox”?

Well a paradox may be defined as, “a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when *investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.*” And so our Catholic faith is *filled* with paradoxes—with mysterious realities and claims that *appear* to be contradictory but are rather *eminently true* and *valid*. And so going back to the words of our Lord from today’s Gospel, our Savior is teaching us that it is *only in dying to ourselves* and living *selflessly* for Him *and for others* that we will find the fullness of life, joy, and peace. In other words, it’s *only* in humbly *dying to ourselves, that we will truly find ourselves*. Now what do I mean by that and what does Jesus mean by these words?

“Death to self” does *not* mean that we reject who God created us to be—in fact it’s far from it. Death to self actually means *becoming who God created us to be*—and who God created us to be is in fact *the best version of ourselves*. “Death to self” means *keeping* what is *objectively good* about ourselves, that which God has generously given to us: our gifts, our talents, our virtuous desires, our nature as human beings, etc. and then *rejecting or relinquishing* that which is *objectively bad* about ourselves: our sinfulness, our vices, our selfishness, our stubborn pride, etc. So dying to ourselves means renouncing our old sinful ways, our selfish and prideful ways, and rising to new life in Christ—a new life of grace, holiness, and freedom.

Dying to ourselves means conforming our *entire lives* to Christ and His Catholic Church out of humility and obedience that is rooted in love. Brothers and sisters, *we were saved* by humility and obedience. In fact, our Lord Jesus *is the model par excellence* of “death to self” given that He lovingly conformed His will to the Father’s will out of *perfect humility and obedience*—the Son of God humbly conformed His will to the Father’s plan of salvation for us, a divine plan that would include His

only Son's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Our Lord Jesus teaches us that *where there is love*, sacrifice and obedience are possible.

Dying to ourselves requires a grace-filled self-awareness and a deep humility and realistic honesty that admits: "I'm a sinner who's in need of a Savior. I'm an imperfect sinner who's in great need of Jesus' mercy and grace." In dying to ourselves we're reminded that *Christ wants to give us something so much greater than we what we currently have!* And we should not interpret or hear that in a distorted or materialistic way like: "Christ wants to give me a life on this earth that is totally free of suffering" or "a life that's defined by money, power, and occupational success."

The life that Christ wants to give us is *His own divine life*—a life of selflessness, compassion, mercy, justice, and courage. The life that Christ wants to bestow upon us in abundance is a life defined by authentic love and genuine inner freedom, peace, and joy, *where the world around me might be crashing and burning* or *I may be in the midst of great suffering*, but *nothing* can take away the peace and joy of my heart and mind.

Such a new life of grace that joyfully radiates holiness *is* the fruit that is borne by the grain falling to the ground and dying. Dying to ourselves *in humility*—dying to our selfish needs, wants, and plans—*opens us up to a whole new horizon of possibilities in Christ*. Brothers and sisters, *do you know your potential in Christ?!* Do you know what our Lord has in store for you, *right now in this life?!* Do you know how much He wants to bless your life with so much grace, peace, joy, freedom, happiness, and love?

As His disciples on this earth, Jesus *never* promises us a life without hardship or suffering. Yet the profound beauty of Christian discipleship—the *beauty of new life in Christ* is that *we could be in the midst of the greatest, most painful, and most terrible suffering and yet still enjoy* tremendous inner peace, happiness, love, and freedom. Life in Christ means that we could be in the midst of the most difficult and challenging situations and yet *still radiate* immense gratitude, compassion, faith, hope, and love.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we've seen in countless saints of the Church for almost 2,000 years, including St. Patrick, whose feast day

we celebrated yesterday. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, St. Patrick joyfully brought the Catholic faith to the peoples of Ireland—a nation which, later in history, would dispatch so many faithful missionaries to the farthest ends of the earth, from Africa to Australia, in order to spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, behind all of the “green beer, green beads, and secular fluff” March 17<sup>th</sup> *lies a truly great man—a great saint*. And I highly encourage you to read more about his life.

St. Patrick was certainly a man who understood the words of Christ from today’s Gospel in the deepest depths of his heart. In his life the great patron saint of Ireland, *who as a young man was an atheist*, would come to discover what “death to self” truly meant in the context of encountering Jesus—in the context of one’s relationship with Christ in and through His Catholic Church. St. Patrick described his own experience of “dying to himself” and embracing a new life in Christ writing, “I know for certain, that before I was humbled I was like a stone lying in deep mire, and He that is mighty came, and in His mercy raised me up and, indeed, *lifted me high up* and placed me on top of the wall. And from there I ought to shout out in gratitude to the Lord for his great

favours in this world and for ever, [favours] that the mind of man cannot measure.”

Brothers and sisters, like St. Patrick, we’re called to humbly die to ourselves and rise to new life in Christ, so that we can embrace the new life of grace and holiness that our Savior wants to give us in abundance. Pope Benedict XVI eloquently said, “The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort, *you were made for greatness.*”

Brothers and sisters, the greatness we’re called to, is the greatness of holiness, the greatness of sanctity—a greatness that is *only* realized when we humbly die to ourselves and begin to live more fully for Christ and others out of a sincere, genuine love.

So as we worship and encounter our Lord Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us plead with our Savior for the grace to increasingly die to ourselves and rise with Him, *so that like St. Patrick*, we can embrace the new life of greatness that we are destined for.