

“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?” These are the powerful words we just heard in the Second Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. One may connect these beautiful words of St. Paul with the words of Jesus Himself, which we find in John’s Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

Brothers and sisters, do we know in the depths of our being just exactly how much God loves us? Or have we grown numb to God’s love for us? Do we simply take Jesus, the Father’s greatest Gift to us, for granted? Jesus, the Son of God, Who is Love Itself in the flesh? Do we view God as a competitor, a rival, and a bully rather than as an immensely generous, merciful, and loving Father?

You know when it comes to atheism, I think many atheists are more likely to hate God rather than firmly reject His existence. And I

think many atheists hate God because sadly they don't know who or what God is, but rather they've embraced all of these false stereotypes and images of God and they believe God is an evil monster, a bully, an oppressor, and a rival. Many atheists don't think that God loves us as a human race but rather that He hates us and that He's not our side. These are truly false judgments about God and fundamental misunderstandings about who He is and what He has given us, done for us, and *continues* to do for us.

Brothers and sisters, God is *not* our rival. He's not our competitor, and He's certainly *not our oppressor*. Contrary to what many believe in our increasingly secular world, *God is truly on our side*—He is 100% *for* us. Many times, we're tempted to fall into the atheist stereotypes about God because of personal suffering and hardship. We're tempted to measure and determine God's love for us based on whether or not we suffer. We think to ourselves: “if I *don't* suffer and experience any hardship or pain in my life, then God must love me and I am truly blessed!” Or we might think, “If I suffer and experience great pain and hardship in my life, then God must *not* love me and I am *not* blessed at

all. God must be punishing me for something. How can He love me if I'm experiencing all this suffering in my life? God must be against me."

Brothers and sisters, God's love for us should not be measured by whether or not we suffer (everyone suffers at some point in this fallen world), nor should God's love for us be determined by our material wealth, possessions, physical health, or professional success. No, God's love for us is *proven* in the greatest and most perfect manner through the Supreme Gift of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God Who saves us from sin and death. ***"He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?"***

In Christ, we experience God's undying love for us and His overwhelming *favor for us*. As we just heard in the Gospel today, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." Are we listening and paying attention? Or are we wrapped up in our own world, closed off to God's saving love for us and imprisoned by our own negative attitudes, habitual patterns of sin, and self-pity? Are we truly listening to Christ, the supreme Proof of God's love for us, through prayer, the sacraments,

and His Church? Or are we listening more to the world, our own ego, and to the voice of the evil one who always seeks to turn us against God through our own suffering and hardship?

Brothers and sisters, how can we claim that suffering is an indicator of God's rejection of us, when it is *through* suffering and death that *God saved us* for all eternity? How can we claim that suffering is proof that God doesn't love us when it is *precisely through* Jesus' own suffering and death that God *proved* His love for us? Christ crucified for the sake of our eternal salvation and happiness is the *Supreme proof* that God loves us more than we can ever know and that He *favors us* more than we favor ourselves. When we're tempted to blame and reject God for our own suffering, know that we're being tempted to reject our own salvation, which was won for us through the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ.

So the next time we suffer, rather than blame and reject God for what's happening to us, let's *thank Him for the gift of sharing in His own suffering*, the gift of sharing in His own cross, which saves us for all eternity and leads us to the fullness of life, freedom, and love. I

know this is easier said than done—I know this is radical! ***But this is authentic Christianity! This is the Gospel!*** The Transfiguration of Jesus in today’s Gospel is a powerful reminder that suffering and death will ***not*** have the last word over the Son of God ***and if*** we follow Him, carry our cross, and faithfully do His will, then we as His disciples will share in His eternal victory and glory.

So not only is God on our side, but He ***proves*** that He’s on our side through the saving Gift of His only Begotten Son, our crucified and risen Savior—a Gift that is clearly prefigured in the Old Testament account of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac, which we just heard in the First Reading. ***There is no greater gift that God can give us than the gift of Himself***—and He gives us this Gift through His Beloved Son our Lord Jesus Christ, Who in turn bestows His Holy Spirit upon us so that we can share in His divine glory for all eternity.

Brothers and sisters, ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*** In other words, if God is on our side, ***then we literally have nothing to be afraid of.*** I know, this sounds radical, but ***it’s true!*** Now this obviously ***doesn’t*** mean that we should live a reckless and irresponsible

life by taking irrational risks as if God will automatically prevent us from being harmed. Rather, what it *does* mean is that as disciples of Christ, *fear should have no power over us when it comes to evil*, be it the physical evils of sickness, pain, and suffering, or the spiritual evils that threaten us through temptation and sin. If God is for us, then *there is no sin* that we cannot overcome. If God is for us, then there is *no temptation that cannot be conquered* and *no cross that cannot be carried! If God is for us, then evil should not intimidate us!* Brothers and sisters, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Lent is a time when we are called to re-encounter God’s incomprehensible and unconditional love for us, sinners though we are. Lent is a time when we are invited to re-experience God’s favor for us—a divine favor manifested through His only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is our crucified and risen Savior. Our Lord Jesus is the supreme Proof that God is *for us* and *not* against us!

As we prepare to worship and receive the Son of God in the Most Holy Eucharist, may we once again prayerfully listen to the powerful words of St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans: “If God is for us, who can

be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?"