**22nd SUNDAY [31st August, 2014]**

READINGS: Jeremiah 20:7-9/ Romans 12:1-2/ Matthew 16:21-27

THEME: DYING, CHRIST DESTROYED OUR DEATH

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

The scourge of the deadly Ebola virus has caused a lot of scare in the world, especially, in West Africa. So far over 3,000 people have been infected, half of whom have already succumbed to death. In the face of such a dreaded virus, what a relief it would have been if there were a tested and certified vaccine! As we pray that soon a certified effective vaccine will be developed against the Ebola virus, let us take practical steps to avoid contracting the disease.

Meanwhile, vaccination is a good illustration for the main lesson of today’s gospel reading. That is, in order to save us from eternal death, Jesus Christ had to suffer, die on the cross and rise on the third day (*cf*. Mt. 16:21). As the Ebola virus causes death, so **sin** is the **spiritual virus** that causes **spiritual death**; for Scripture says that “the wages of sin is death”.

A vaccine is made from the virus (e.g. Ebola virus) or germ that causes a disease. The virus or germ is taken through a process by which it is weakened or killed, and then used to produce the vaccine, with which one is injected. One’s body then develops immunity against the disease (e.g. Ebola).

To develop a vaccine, the virus has to be put in a medium. Similarly, Christ Jesus took upon himself the trouble (suffering) of becoming the medium for the spiritual virus of sin. Secondly, as the virus has to be destroyed in order to develop the vaccine, so Christ died on the cross in order to destroy the potency of spiritual virus of sin (*cf*. Col. 2:14). Thus, by His death and resurrection, Christ has developed the spiritual vaccine (God’s grace) against the deadly effect of the virus of sin.

How, then, do we take in the spiritual vaccine against spiritual death? In the past, some parents refused the vaccination of their children against, for example, polio. They doubted the intentions of the health programme and their children suffered the consequence. However, those who “believed” in the efficacy of the vaccine saved their children. Similarly, the first step towards receiving the spiritual vaccine is to ***believe in Christ crucified***. Thus, St. Paul says: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. … We preach ***Christ crucified***, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks [Africans and Europeans, Asians and Americans], ***Christ*** [***crucified***] is the power and wisdom of God” to save (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24).

One does not only believe that a vaccine is effective, one must also take the step of going in for the vaccination. Similarly, the Christian does not only believe that we are saved by Christ crucified; he/she has to put into action his/her belief. That is why Christ says: “Anyone who wants to come after me, he [she] must deny himself [herself], take up his [her] cross and follow me” (Mt. 16:24).

Someone may ask: if we have been vaccinated through Christ’s death and resurrection, why do we still suffer? Let us address this question as follows: in the normal medical vaccination, the body system may take a while to adjust to the vaccine; sometimes some people even have a reaction like fever. Similarly, if we are suffering today, it is like an initial fever, telling us that our souls are adjusting to the spiritual vaccination.

Jesus, the Divine Physician, who vaccinates us, cannot err. So every bodily sickness or pain or suffering we experience is an assurance that our souls are adjusting well and our spiritual immune system is getting stronger and stronger. Therefore, may every sickness or suffering you and I experience make our souls healthy for heaven! Amen!