**Theme:** **The Suffering of the Christian**
**Readings:** Isaiah 50:5-9 / James 2:14-18 / Mark 8:27-35
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Christians, like all other human beings, suffer or experience challenges and problems in life. Some, for instance, lose their jobs or businesses, while others have problems in their marriages. Again, we sometimes get sick, or even lose our dear ones when we need them the most. These problems and challenges can sometimes make us question the existence of God, or ask: ‘where is our God?’ Today’s message, however, reminds us that it is normal for the Christian to suffer, for Jesus says that to follow him, we must renounce ourselves, take up our cross (of sufferings), and follow him.

But then, we may ask, since Jesus has suffered and died on the cross to save us, why do we also have to suffer?  Now let me illustrate why we also have to suffer despite the saving suffering of Jesus Christ.  Someone, for instance, may ‘suffer’ a surgery to donate his kidney to save another person. But the latter would not be saved if he does not want to ‘suffer’ the surgery required for the kidney transplant. Similarly, by dying on the cross, Jesus has suffered to offer us his ‘kidney’, but we also have to suffer the pain of surgery to receive the ‘kidney’.

Here is another illustration: Imagine a single parent, a needy mother, who does two or three odd jobs as well as sells her clothing to cater for the education of her children. Now, is her struggle or suffering sufficient to make the children pass their exams? No; for they have to play their parts by attending classes and struggle to study hard in order to pass their exam. Similarly, though Jesus Christ has suffered for our salvation, we also need to play our part. That is why he says: ‘He who wants to follow me must renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me’.

Therefore, beloved, playing our part to follow Jesus entails struggles or sufferings. These may come in the form of a loss of job, a loss in business, no employment after graduation, no marriage, marriage with no children, sickness, death of a dear one, etc.  When we experience any of these or similar problems or pains in life, we should not question the existence of God, nor think he has abandoned us, nor question His goodness. Rather, we should be encouraged to persevere in faith by the fact that that is the way of salvation and that the reward at the end of this way of the cross is exceedingly amazing and everlasting.

Furthermore, St. James, in the second reading, also emphasizes that we have a part to play towards our salvation, when he says FAITH alone is NOT SUFFICIENT. We need to perform GOOD DEEDS as well.  Going back to our first imagery, if the surgery for the kidney transplant represents the suffering we endure, then the medication that the patient takes for good recovery represents the good deeds required of us.

**CONCLUSION**
Beloved,

* As fire purifies gold, so may God turn every suffering of ours into a fire that purifies our souls, Amen!
* May He increase our good deeds, Amen!
* And may every good deed we perform strengthen our faith unto salvation, Amen!