**14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, July 6th, 2025.**

**We boast in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Sunday texts**: Isaiah 66:10-14, Galatians 6:14-18, Luke 10:1-20.

Galatians 6:14-18:

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule - to the Israel of God. From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.
Amen". (Galatians 6:14-18. New International Version)

Jesus said also; "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me". (Matthew 10:38)

To take up our cross and follow Jesus means to be willing to publicly identify with Jesus, to experience certain opposition, and to be willing to face even suffering and death for his sake. The more we love the rewards of this life (leisure, power, popularity, financial security), the more we will discover how empty they truly are.

Salvation and new life are found solely through faith in Christ's sacrifice, not through adherence to the law or any other system. Therefore, as disciples of the Lord, our primary focus is on Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has written our names in heaven. The best way to enjoy life, therefore, is to loosen our greedy grasp on earthly rewards so that we can be free to follow Christ. In doing so, we will inherit life and begin at once to experience the benefits of following Jesus Christ.

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". (Mark 8: 34). Jesus here talks about the ***ultimate submission required of his followers***. Christ is not against pleasure, nor was he saying that we should seek pain needlessly. Jesus was talking about the heroic efforts to

follow Him moment by moment, to do His will, even when the work is difficult and the future looks bleak.

Paul declares that he bears on his body the marks of Jesus. Property and slaves in the ancient world were branded with a mark of ownership. Paul views himself as a slave of Christ who bears physical scars from the many persecutions that accompanied his apostolic work. The passage concludes with a blessing, wishing the Lord Jesus Christ's grace to be with the spirit of the believers.

In our gospel text, Jesus sends a large group (72) of disciples on missions of their own. He emphasizes the many failures that they will face, promising them hunger, poverty, conflict, and rejection. However, when the seventy-two return to Jesus, they boast that powers and spirits are subject to them. By contrast, they recount no stories of rejection or conflicts; instead, they had stories of success. Jesus invites them to remember what is truly important and to focus on things with eternal values. “Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven, that is to say, they must rejoice because they share eternal life with God. The disciple of the Lord has his/her primary focus on Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has written our names in heaven. Amen.

The question is, when was the last time you boasted about your close relationship with Jesus?

**Few Examples of Heroic Witnesses of the Cross of Jesus.**

In some parts of the world, Christians and religious leaders face harassment, imprisonment and torture. They are also defamed in the media and falsely accused of faults they never committed. We are the successors of the seventy-two disciples; we are called upon to do Christ’s work with courage and convictions.

**St Maximilian Kolbe in Poland** was a priest who lived during the time of World War II. He was arrested in 1941 by the German Gestapo and taken to prison. Kolbe was the victim of severe violence and harassment. In Auschwitz, men were chosen to face death by starvation to warn against escapes. Kolbe was not chosen but volunteered to take the place of a man with a family. It is said that during the last days of his life, Kolbe led prayers to Our Lady with the prisoners and remained calm. He was the last of the group to stay alive, after two weeks of dehydration and

starvation. The guards gave him a lethal injection of carbolic acid. The stories tell that he raised his left arm and calmly awaited death. Now, Maximilian Kolbe is declared a saint. He was willing to be a prophet, to follow the way of Jesus, and he loved his enemies, even those who put him to death.

**Saint Teresa of Calcutta** spent her life looking after the poor, the sick, orphans, abandoned children, alcoholics, the aging, and street people. She founded the Missionaries of Charity, who joined her to serve the poor. Mother Teresa's love knew no bounds. Her energy crisscrossed the globe, pleading for support and inviting others to see the face of Jesus in the poorest of the poor. In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She was canonized on September 4, 2016.

**Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador**: The Archbishop Romero repeatedly denounced violence and spoke out on behalf of the victims of the civil war. In a time of heavy press censorship, his weekly radio broadcasts were often the only way people could find out the truth about the atrocities that were happening in their country. He was threatened many times by death. At the end of his life, or two weeks before he was shot to death, a reporter asked him, "Why don't you leave the country? They're going to kill you," and of course, Oscar Romero was committed to his people, who were being killed every day. He said, "Of course, I've been threatened with death many times, but I don't believe in death without resurrection, so even if they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people." In 1980, he was assassinated by a gunshot in the middle of an Eucharistic celebration. He gave his life for the people he loves. He offered his life at that moment, out of love for his enemies. He said, "In fact, if they do kill me, you may tell them, even now I bless and forgive those who do it."

**Christian Persecutions in Nigeria**: Over 18,000 churches have been destroyed or burnt down in northern Nigeria since 2009, at least 16,000 Christians killed for their faith between 2019 and 2023, and 5 million more displaced from their homes. Thousands of children and women live in refugee camps across the nation in their own country as we speak. Who are the people behind these crimes? Boko Haram, who have a strong connection with ISIS and other Islamic jihadist groups. Record shows that over 200 priests and seminarians have been kidnapped across Nigeria in the last ten years, and over 15 have died as a result. Forty-seven worshippers were massacred on Christmas Day 2024 in the Middle Belt. This included my friend, Fr Stepen Ojapah, MSP, who was kidnapped in 2022, and he spent 33 days in the kidnapper's den. He shared his

terrible experiences in his book; TEARS AND TORTURE: 33 Days in Kidnappers Den, September 6, 2024.

Despite these acts of terrorists in Nigeria, one wonders why Churches still get filled up with worshippers every Sunday. “The more the people are persecuted, the stronger Christians become”. According to Femi Emmanuel Adeojo, “Christ is the only reason we need. He was persecuted and he died, but he rose. We believe that whoever sacrifices his life could cause many to convert back to Christ. So, like St Paul, if we die, we die in Christ.” See, ***Columbia magazine, published by the knights of Columbus,*** May 2025, page 9.

**Question**: What are my reactions in the face of hungry people, the homeless, those who are confused, overwhelmed, and distressed with all the stress of life? What is my response to people facing persecution or life-threatening health challenges?

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. … I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen”. (Galatians 6:14-18.)

**Amen**.

**Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.**