

## FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we draw near to the liturgical feast of Sts. Nereus and Achilleus, Martyrs, on May 12, the Church places before us a powerful sign of the victory of the Resurrection. We can walk this path of the rediscovery of our Baptism, and these two saints speak directly to our hearts.

Nereus and Achilleus were soldiers in the Praetorian Guard, the elite force that served the Roman emperors. They lived immersed in the violence and idolatry of the empire. They carried out cruel orders, obeying out of fear, their hands stained with blood, their lives submitted to the logic of this world: power, domination, and survival at any cost. But then came the miracle of faith. The living Gospel reached them. Suddenly, they were converted. They threw away their shields, their armor, and their blood-stained spears. They abandoned the camp of the evil one and chose Christ. They preferred to lose everything rather than deny the Lord. For this they were exiled and finally beheaded, bearing witness with their blood.

This is the same conversion that the Lord wants to work in each one of us. We too have lived according to the “tyrants” of our time: the dictatorship of relativism, the slavery of consumerism, the fears that paralyze us, the compromises with sin. Many of us carry heavy burdens, broken families, wounded hearts, lives marked by mediocrity or even open rebellion against God. Yet, the Lord wants to repeat this miracle through the announcement of the Kerygma to us. “Christ is risen! He has conquered sin and death!” This announcement is not a nice idea; it is a Person who wants to meet us and change the direction of our existence.

We can live the catechumenate of the early Church. Like Nereus and Achilleus, we can allow the Word of God to pierce our hearts and reveal our idols. We can renounce the old man and clothe ourselves with the new man, created in Christ. We can celebrate the Eucharist with the awareness that we are a people on pilgrimage, a people walking toward the Promised Land. The martyrs teach us that this journey is not without cost. To follow Jesus means to take up the Cross. It means saying “no” to the world when it demands that we adore its golden calves.

Pope St. Damasus wrote of them with emotion: “O miracle of faith! Suddenly they cease from their fury, they become converted, they fly from the camp of their wicked leader...” This same miracle continues today. Men and women who once lived far from God are rising, throwing off the chains of sin, and becoming courageous witnesses. Some of you here have left addictions, others have reconciled broken marriages, others have discovered the joy of openness to life, still others have found the strength to forgive the unforgivable. This is the power of the Resurrection at work!

The feast of Nereus and Achilleus also reminds us of the ecclesial dimension of our faith. They did not convert alone. In the same way, our personal conversion is never private. It is meant to build up the Church and to reach those who still live in darkness. This is why we announce the Gospel together, and become a living sign of the new humanity reconciled in Christ. In these times, when the Church faces new persecutions, sometimes subtle through secularism and indifference, sometimes open in many parts of the world, the martyrs encourage us. Do not be afraid! The blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians. Their victory is already won in Christ. Our task is to remain faithful, to celebrate the Passover with joy, and to walk with perseverance until the end. Bring your lives, your struggles, and your joys. Let us ask Sts. Nereus and Achilleus to intercede for us, that we may have the same courage and the same joy in following the Lord.

Peace,