

6th Sunday of Easter/First Holy Communion – May 5/6, 2018 – Reflection

On Friday I was driving back from New Jersey where I go almost every week to visit my Mom who lives now in a care facility. As the weekend traffic through Connecticut was moving slowly, I had the time to look to my left and right at the scenery. I happily noticed that with the warm Spring weather that has finally arrived, there were also lots and lots of butterflies that were flying and lighting on little flowers and flying again. It made me happy just to look at them and to think that after the long winter, the earth is renewed and life has sprung forth.

This time of the year in Catholic Parishes all over the country, little children are receiving Jesus for the first time in Holy Communion. Little girls are dressed in their white dresses, little boys in their suits and ties, almost as if they are butterflies; signs that the life of the Church is renewed in them, and it reminds me of a bittersweet story I once was told.

There once was a man who saw a butterfly shuddering on the sidewalk, locked in a seemingly hopeless struggle to free itself from its now useless cocoon. Feeling in his pants, he took his pocket knife, carefully cut away the cocoon, and set the butterfly free. But to his dismay, the butterfly lay on the sidewalk convulsing weakly for a while and then died.

That was the worst thing he could have done a biologist friend told him later. A butterfly needs that struggle to develop the muscles to fly. By robbing it of that struggle, the man had made the butterfly too weak to live. The cocoon builds up the endurance of the butterfly. It can never fly if it is cut free from its cocoon.

Faith ... being a real disciple ... being a lifelong friend of Jesus ... isn't about fancy dresses and handsome suits or pictures and videos or family parties and celebrations. And, it's not about the first time, which sadly for so many of our little ones, becomes the last and only time. Faith and love are built in hearing God's word every week; receiving Jesus in Holy Communion every week; confessing our faults and being reconciled over and over again; trying to serve our Lord by serving our neighbors in love whenever there's a need.

Our First Holy Communion is a joyful celebration of new life, but without sharing in the cross of Jesus; without suffering, doubt, setback, struggle, and the dogged determination to be faithful while others would fall away, we Christians would be too weak to undertake the battle between good and evil.

But, strengthened by the word, by Communion, by the community of believers in the Church, by the cross, we can overcome all things in Christ ... we fly!