

MARCH 16, 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

Yakov Smirnoff is a well known American comedian who was born in Ukraine. Some years ago he joked about having culture shock when he went to the superstore for the first time when he arrived in the United States. When he saw a box with a picture of an orange on it, he asked one of the employees, “Excuse me sir, I have never seen this in my life. Can you tell me what this is?” He replied, “Oh, this is orange juice powder, you add water to it and it becomes orange juice.” Then he saw in another section, a milk powder, and then the egg powder. After seeing a baby powder he nearly fainted!

If only changes were that easy! We experience difficulties and challenges everyday, and I’m sure we all wish there were some magical formula that could solve all our problems. But unfortunately there are no shortcuts in our lives.

God made three promises to Abraham: he will be the father of a great nation, so numerous will his descendents be, and He will give him the promised land. In order for God’s promises to be fulfilled, Abraham first had to leave behind his country, his family, father’s house and all his possessions. In other words, through Abraham’s faith and obedience, he and his descendents would inherit God’s promised blessing. And to show him proof, God pointed to the sky and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars. Just so shall your descendents be!” With the advancement of our technology now we know there are 10 billion galaxies and 100 billion stars in each galaxy. So when we do the math it is like 1 billion trillion stars in the sky! What a spectacular promise and blessing! And God did this in broad daylight, when Abraham could not see any stars in the sky. Even though Abraham couldn’t see any stars in the sky, he knew God could, so Abraham believed. God knows

everything and He sees everything. God not only sees everything, but He can open all doors, remove all our obstacles, and make all things happen. Just like Abraham, God calls each and every one of us to leave behind our old self and former ways of life in order to seek God's Kingdom.

In the gospel we see the account of the Lord's transfiguration. It would have been just a week before the Transfiguration took place that Simon Peter would have confessed to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The disciples came to believe in Jesus because they had seen the power of God at work in Him: Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish to feed the five thousand people, performed many miracles, drove out unclean spirits, and even calmed the stormy sea by simply rebuking it. But even after having acknowledged Jesus as God, the disciples were still reluctant to accept God's plan of salvation in the way that Jesus planned to fulfill it - death on the cross. Accepting God's way isn't easy and if the disciples could have their way, they would have avoided the cross all together.

Like the disciples, we prefer to remain in our comfort zones. We prefer to live a life without having to go through pain and suffering. We often envision happiness without having to undergo a painful process of change that requires commitment and sacrifice on our part. So we try to change the circumstances in life and people around us so that we don't have to change. We hope that our prayers will change God's mind, so that we don't have to change our ways. We hope to be healthy and fit, without having to make lifestyle changes, like our diet and having to exercise. And we hope to be rich without making the effort of hard work, instead we hope to win the lottery. These are some of the ways in which our defense mechanism is at work in our lives, looking for an easy way out.

But there could be no Christianity without the cross. So Jesus knew that lesson of the cross would be a hard lesson for His disciples and for us to learn. That is why Jesus took Peter, James and John to reveal His glory that lies beyond the cross, to show the glory that lies beyond what is easily perceived to be a failure, a victory beyond defeat, in order to give us hope and courage during our trial. Bishop Fulton Sheen pointed out so eloquently when he said, “When Jesus was transfigured, it was His face, body and garments that were transformed into glory...the face that suffered humiliation - beaten, spat upon, and covered with blood, and His body that was broken - scourged, crucified, and pierced, and the garment that embraced His sacred wounds! It was these marks of His passion that were transfigured into glory.”

St. Therese of Lisieux said, “Trials help us detach ourselves from the earth; they make us look higher than this world.” Suffering is just part of the human experience, Jesus willingly chose passion and death as an instrument of salvation so that He could unite us with His suffering. Rather than taking away our pain, Jesus gave us hope and purpose to our suffering, and filled our sufferings with meaning. There could be no crossless Christianity, just as there could be no Easter glory without the Good Friday's Passion. Even though God may not take away our suffering, He sure does give us strength and courage necessary for us to carry our cross daily. One day, God will exchange our crosses with the riches and the glories of God's Kingdom.

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