

From the Chaplaincy



HOW MANY NAILS

By Fr. Francis Ongkingco

“Father, what’s the difference between Jesus in Calvary and a painting of Jesus in Calvary?” Chuck snappily asked before the class started.

“Obviously, one is historical, and the other is a representation!” I confidently answered.

“Nope!” He corrected me.

“What then?”

*“It takes **three** nails to hang Jesus on the Cross and only **one** to hang a painting.”*

“Huh!!!?”

“Did you get it, Father!” He definitely felt proud about appearing smart to his other classmates.

“Guess you have a point there, Chuck!” I scratched my head while another more profound realization popped into my mind.

What Chuck shared seems to appear as a dead-ended smart remark. It is, however, quite profound if we are ready to apply his imagery - humanly and spiritually - to our lives.

Historically, nailing someone on a cross must have required a lot of preparation and effort. The executioners would have naturally considered the person's height, weight and health. Afterwards, they had to determine the size of the cross, the number of nails and length of ropes and more that we cannot imagine.

In other words, it wasn't easy to nail someone on a cross. It would have been easier to simply behead someone and bury him. But the Romans needed the crucifixion as a public ad board to warn everyone to behave, or else! Thus, it must have required not only hands and materials, but also considerable money.

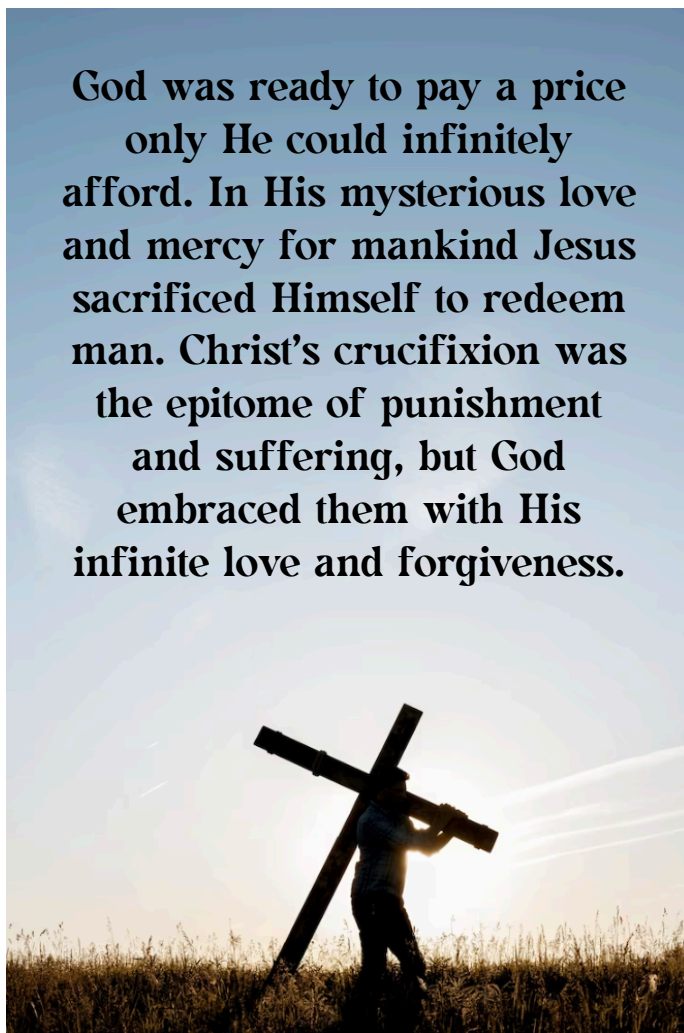
Divine providence had also taken this into account! God was ready to pay a price only He could infinitely afford. In His mysterious love and mercy for mankind Jesus sacrificed Himself to redeem man. Christ's crucifixion was the epitome of punishment and suffering, but God embraced them with His infinite love and forgiveness. Only thus, will the devil, sin and death no longer enslave man.

Perhaps, today people take the value of Calvary and our Lord's unconditional love for granted. This is aptly described by Chuck's image of hanging a portrait of the Crucifixion with only one nail. Still, this apparently flimsy image has a very powerful application to our lives and actuations.

There is no need count to three nails before crucifying Jesus or our neighbor, *one* nail would be enough. Perhaps, you and I may think, what is *one* compared to *three*? Whether it is one or three, what matters isn't so much the number of times (though this is also significant) but of having offended Someone who loves us infinitely.

Imagine how *one* thing may dramatically and devastatingly stand out? That one click that strays us into a pornographic site. That one word that curses another driver, shopper, cashier or waiter. That one gesture or indifference that leaves a

God was ready to pay a price only He could infinitely afford. In His mysterious love and mercy for mankind Jesus sacrificed Himself to redeem man. Christ's crucifixion was the epitome of punishment and suffering, but God embraced them with His infinite love and forgiveness.



neighbor cold or hungry in the streets. These are but minor and swift moments, and yet how one thought, word or act is enough to hang a portrait of pride, anger, lust, laziness, etc. that makes our Lord and others suffer enormously.

God does not deserve any of our sins. He, however, knows our frailty and He perfectly understands that we are like little children who want to try our best. Beautifully it is said, and demands our sincere and wholehearted response, that God doesn't want us *perfect* here on earth (there is Heaven for that), but that we strive to *love* Him and others.

Then instead of sin, could we not focus on *one* concrete deed of love every day? Wouldn't that make all the difference to unnailed the portrait of "this pitiful mask I have fashioned with my wretched doings. (St. Josemaría, Way of the Cross, 6th Station)"