

Dear Friends,

I ran across a Latin phrase in the Catechism of the Catholic Church last week that brought about a profound moment of insight for me. The phrase is *animi cruciatus* and it is translated as an affliction of the heart. Interestingly, this phrase is used in paragraph 1431 as a reference to conversion, which, in the Sacred Scriptures, is what repentance is all about. It is my experience, and I believe the experience of almost everyone who has had a profound encounter with Christ leading to a change of heart, that there is always some kind of pain that accompanies conversion. Athletes say, "No pain, no gain." This principal certainly applies to our spiritual lives as well.

Being disciples of Christ demands a painful cost. Jesus even said, "Anyone who wishes to follow me must take up his cross each day and follow in my steps (Mark 9:34)." Why am I bringing up the concept of *animi cruciatus*? For several reasons: (1) it struck me in a powerful way because I have had several moments of conversion in my life and they have all had profoundly painful moments; (2) we have five people in the current RCIA process in our parish who are hoping to enter into the Catholic Church; (3) our diocese is going to embark upon an evangelical process that will invite people who have fallen away from the Catholic Church to consider making a return to the Lord.

I have friends back home who can remember what I was like when I was in high school. I was pretty wild. That's the 1970's for you. However, I don't have anyone to blame but myself for the dumb decisions that I made. When I was 24 years old I began a life of recovery that lasts to this day. Being in recovery is essential to my life. Getting to the point of recovery was not easy; it was accompanied by the pain of feeling. I no longer had my addictions as safe havens from my pain. I had to learn how to feel it and deal with it without turning to my wonderful crutches. I will forever be grateful to all the friends who have helped me along the way to deal with my own *animi cruciatus*.

Those five people going through the RCIA in our parish, along with all the other catechumens and candidates throughout the world, are looking forward, I believe, to a wonderful experience of joining the Church and embracing a new faith. However, that means letting go of their old ways of life. That is never easy for anyone. They need our prayers, support and encouragement along the way. They need to know that we are here for them, that we welcome them, and that we, too, look forward to them joining us in our faith journey. But that letting go is a profound *animi cruciatus*.

Those fallen away Catholics who see the commercials that will be aired in December and January and are impacted by them are going to encounter God's grace. Hopefully that encounter will be experienced as tender, beautiful and joyful. However, some people are angry at the Church for various reasons. Some might feel profound grief or shame. Some will wonder if they will feel welcomed and worthy. Some might feel like they are going to be judged harshly because of the Church's laws, especially the ones regarding Holy Communion. Our parish and all the others in our diocese are going to have to work hard to be welcoming, patient, gracious and most of all, kind. Because the sense of *animi cruciatus* will, in a collective way, be powerful.

But *animi cruciatus* is an essential part of our story of growing closer to God each day, and in the end, it is a beautiful thing.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel