

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING



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 March 6, 2015

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Mt 6:12).

“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Mt 6:14,15).

What ills people have done to us, are nothing in comparison to how we have hurt God by *our* sinful acts. So Jesus said that God will not forgive us, if we are hard-hearted and refuse to forgive. Our *Catechism of the Catholic Church* admits that this is rather scary. It explains, “Now—and this is daunting—this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father’s merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to His grace” (CCC, 2840).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

During this Lenten Season we should make a decision to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In confessing our sins and lack of forgiveness for those who have hurt us, we open ourselves up to God’s graces. Then during Lent we can begin to pray daily for the salvation of these souls. We need to be determined to do this. As time passes God will reward us with peace of mind.

Pray for Souls

Our Church and our merciful God know our weaknesses—“It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession” (CCC, 2843). Our Catechism says, by “*intercession*”, by prayer. This teaching comes from Jesus, Himself. Jesus stated, “*You have heard that*

it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and **pray** for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:43-45). Jesus tells us to **pray** for the souls of those who have hurt us and continue to hurt us. He said to St. Faustina, “Do you pray for your enemies? Do you wish well to those who have, in one way or another, caused you sorrow or offended you? Know that whatever good you do to any soul, I accept it as if you had done it to Me” (Diary, 1768). Even while we are still wounded, we must not remain angry, but pray for the conversion of these people. Jesus said to St. Faustina, “The prayer most pleasing to Me is the prayer for the conversion of sinners. Know, My daughter, that this prayer is always heard and answered” (Diary, 1397).

Redemptive Suffering

If Jesus could love us so much that He purposely came to earth to die on the Cross for us sinners in order to open the gates of Heaven for us, couldn’t we at least make an attempt to love all sinners, too. If they are living in mortal sin, we can encourage them to change. We can pray for them and offer self-sacrifices, penance, and Masses for them. Jesus said to St. Faustina, “Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners” (Diary, 1032). Our prayer could begin like this, “Jesus, I join my sufferings to Your Passion, and offer them to our heavenly Father for (name) and for all souls”.

The crucifix, showing Jesus nailed to the Cross, should not only be a reminder of what He did for souls, but of what we should do, too. St. Faustina wrote, “I saw the Lord Jesus upon the Cross. From His hands, feet and side, the Most Sacred Blood was flowing. After some time, Jesus said to me, ‘All this is for the salvation of souls. Consider well, My daughter, what you are doing for their salvation’ ” (Diary, 1184).

We can love our enemies, if we are concerned for the wellbeing of their souls, and earnestly pray for them daily. Then all thoughts of revenge and hatred will disappear. I have actually done this. But I had to persevere in praying for the souls of these people. We have to be patient, it takes time. Gradually as the weeks and months go by, our wounded hearts will be changed into intercession, and we will be pleasing to God. Then *our* hearts will be open to the Father’s merciful love and His saving grace.

Our Daily Cross

Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). Mary, the Mother of Jesus, stood at the foot of the Cross, looking with great love and compassion at Jesus, sharing in His suffering, trying to comfort and console Him as He died. She joined Jesus in His loving sacrifice because she loved souls. “There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of His suffering, joining herself with His sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim, born of her...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 964).

Rescue Souls through Sacrifice and Prayer

Jesus spoke to St. Faustina and therefore to us: “My daughter, I want to instruct you on how you are to rescue souls through sacrifice and prayer. You will save more souls through prayer and suffering than will a missionary through his teachings and sermons alone. ... You shall accept all sufferings with love.

Do not be afflicted if your heart often experiences repugnance and dislike for sacrifice. All its power rests in the will, and so these contrary feelings, far from lowering the value of the sacrifice in My eyes, will enhance it” (*Diary*, 1767).

Do not be Absorbed in Your Misery

Sometimes we can get overwhelmed by the problems we face in life; especially if we turn inward and constantly dwell on the negative aspects of it all. Then we tend to dig the hole deeper and deeper and feel submerged in our misery—this is not a good thing. If we get to the point where we think that our problems are insurmountable, impossible to solve, then we are not turning in faith to God, but doubt His ability to help. At this point the Evil One is jumping up and down with joy. He wants us to turn our back on God, give up and quit trying.

We can **make a decision** to make a loving sacrifice for souls even when it is not easy or convenient. Making this great effort will not go unnoticed by Jesus. He said to St. Faustina, “...unite, in a special way, even your smallest deeds to My merits, and then My Father will look upon them with love as if they were My own” (*Diary*, 1543). Jesus said to St. Faustina, “**Do not be absorbed in your misery ... be merciful to others**” (*Diary*, 1486). Being merciful to others changes our focus to something positive. It feels good to help others and see them smile in gratitude. The problems won’t necessarily disappear, but we will feel so much better, filled with the love of God. In this way we can make good use of all our trials, pain and sufferings for the good of souls.

I Thirst for Souls

St. Faustina wrote, “During Holy Mass, I saw the Lord Jesus nailed upon the Cross amidst great torments. A soft moan issued from His Heart. After some time, He said, ‘I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners’ ” (*Diary*, 1032). With each agony during the day we can bring this prayer to mind for a certain soul, for a certain intension. Then we can experience with a sense of relief that each trial has **great spiritual value**.

Courage in Trials

Our Holy Catholic Church teaches that we are to imitate Jesus in our lives here on Earth, and take up our cross and follow Him (see *Mark 8:34*). This is a hard Word, to take up our cross of trials and sufferings. When something dreadful happens to us we are tempted to say, “Why me?” But we have to remember that we deserve our sufferings because of our sinfulness.

Jesus wants us to look upon our trials as an opportunity to do penance. God sometimes needs to get our attention, to get us to stop and think about our spiritual wellbeing. God knows the overall picture of our lives. He knows what is best for us. He is in control. “He is master of history, governing hearts and events in keeping with his will” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 269). In faith we pray, “*Lord, let Your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in You*” (*Psalms 33:22*).

We are not left alone. We know that Jesus loves us infinitely, more than we can ever imagine. He suffered and died for us. We ask Him to give us courage in trials. St. Paul wrote, “*We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose*” (*Romans*

8:28). While we live in this world we must strive to do God's will in joyful submission, loving one another and speaking His Word.

In prayer we can offer our sufferings for the good of our soul and for all sinners. Also, each day we can offer our sufferings for the good of a particular soul that we are praying for. Knowing this, we can obtain strength to persevere; and perhaps our sufferings can even be turned into joy, knowing the good that they can accomplish.

St. Paul said, "*What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:35,37-39).

The more we pray, do penance and offer sacrifices, God can do more work in inspiring souls to repent and convert, aiding the salvation of mankind. This Lent, for penance for our sins, may we have the attitude of humility and perseverance in the midst of our sufferings, as we pray with faith in God, fast, and perform works of charity for souls. Jesus, we trust in You.

The Meaning of Suffering

In 1984 Saint John Paul II wrote his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering. The following are some quotations from this document found in Part V- Sharers in the Suffering of Christ: (I added emphasis to some words.)

"19. The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has *his own share in the Redemption*. Each one is also *called to share in that suffering* through which the Redemption was accomplished. ... In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ *has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption*. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.

"24. ... The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings – in any part of the world and at any time in history – to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world."