

FAITH HABITS

PAIN AND SUFFERING – A JOURNEY IN HEALING

Real life is about suffering. As Lent begins, I send you special greetings. Ash Wednesday initiates the most important period of prayer and worship in the yearly cycle of the Church. We are asked to open our hearts and lives more deeply to the message of the Gospel and the Cross. We are also urged to open our arms in greater love and compassion to the needs of all those here in our Faith Community at St. Mary's.

Lent is a Journey. It's a great time to find renewed faith, forgiveness, healing, hope, and courage. These are the gifts of the Cross; that through working together, we can help others receive increased faith from the hands of Jesus, Fr. Jim and all of us.

Our heart is always hungry for happiness. As a result, we try to avoid suffering, believing that it is an obstacle to happiness. Suffering is a part of everyone's life; no one is the exception. How we deal with suffering is what determines happiness.

The whole world encourages us to run from suffering, to try and "look the other way". But, the message of this Lenten season is different from the message of our everyday culture. Jesus encourages us to embrace suffering, to accept it, to use it as an opportunity to surrender to God (always easy for the other person, never me).

Why? The world sees suffering as worthless. Jesus reveals the importance and permanence of suffering. As we continue through this Lenten season, many examples of Jesus, a living person just like us, through His love for us, His dying on the cross for our sins, has shown us new meaning for our pain.

There is something about suffering that refines us. Pain and suffering pushes away the defective edges of our character and personality. Suffering perfects us. If we are always trying to avoid the sufferings of daily life, we tend to become bitter and resentful. But, when we accept suffering, and the struggles of each day, we slowly transform into the best version of ourselves.

Remember John 3:13-17 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life". Jesus' life, pain, teachings, throughout this Lenten season shows us He is the ultimate teacher. He leads the way by His example. He shows us that new life, the abundant life, is always found on the other side of suffering. Jesus shows us that suffering has value. He invites us to follow Him by taking up our crosses and embrace suffering.

As we enter into this Lenten season, let us all ask ourselves: How do we view our suffering? Do we see it as an opportunity to grow in virtue and character? Or, do we spend our lives trying to escape suffering? Does the answer to these questions affect the way we react to the people around us? How should I respond?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I pray that You show me increased passion for all those crosses I find within myself. I am grateful each day for Your love.

Have a great Lenten season!
Dale Cousino