

FAITH HABITS

PAIN AND SUFFERING – Part 2

One of the greatest challenges to us is the experience of suffering. How, as people of faith, here within our own parish, who truly believe in a loving compassionate God, can we understand the meaning and purpose of our pain and suffering? I'm sure that question has haunted every generation of our ancestors and is often the question we ask ourselves. I'm sure it is important to realize there has never been, and never will be an answer to the meaning of suffering.

Suffering can be physical, mental, or spiritual, and could often be all of these at once. Suffering can be individual, or can be the problem of a whole family. Suffering can be the action of cruelty, or even illness. Lately, we seem to see a huge amount of suffering due to forces of nature. Our suffering seems to respect no boundaries, engulfing people of every class, age, or culture.

Our Catholic faith teaches us to find the meaning of suffering. Is suffering a punishment of sin? In the book of Job, we find Jesus rejecting this connection. Some of our suffering is the result of our sinfulness as a consequence of wrong action, such as bad habits, like smoking or drinking too much. We suffer by disrespecting our bodies (self inflicted suffering). If perhaps, someone tells a friend un-truths about someone, that person also causes much pain and suffering.

Human beings make decisions that cause suffering. Wrongful decisions frequently lead to wars, changes in economy, causing desperation and hunger. Often lack of responsibility causes heartache and broken lives or spirits. Suffering in our world is often found in natural disasters. Is God really speaking to us with a tsunami or typhoon, which claims thousands of lives?

All of us try to find adequate explanations to our suffering. But, what is our Catholic explanation of pain? We must keep our eyes and mind fixed on what the gospel portrayal of Jesus shows us. The answer is always found in the lessons we must learn from His struggle with pain, suffering and death at His Crucifixion. I have always felt that I find many answers to most of my problems when I see the agony of Jesus crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, with His side pierced. Jesus endured great suffering so we could find redemption and eternal happiness!

Above all, Jesus on the cross plants hope in our midst of suffering. Our personal explanations of suffering are frail and the experience of suffering can overwhelm us at times, and even tempt us to despair. But at the center of our Catholic belief stands the Cross, a symbol of acute injustice and pain, but at the same time, His sign of committed love and life renewed. The Cross brings into our faith the enduring hope that life and love are stronger than death and evil. That belief, sealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, brings ultimate meaning to the experience of our human pain and suffering.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for Your ultimate experience on the Cross. Lent offers us opportunity to improve our attitude toward suffering. We pray that our spiritual strength is not measured by what we suffer, but by the spirit with which we bear our suffering and pain. We ask this in Jesus' name

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