

Faith Habits

Pain and Suffering part V

Why Avoid Pain & Suffering

The suffering in our world seems overwhelming at times. It cries out to us constantly, from relatives, friends, the TV, newspapers, the elderly, wars, etc. Suffering afflicts all of us. Yes, our world is full of pain and suffering, but how do we respond?

Denial is one of the easiest ways. We see, we hear, and we look the other way. We put off visiting a friend in need; we don't even call someone that needs an encouraging word. We don't even listen to caring friends that offer advice to us when we don't try to correct our own life-threatening bad habits. Surely, we don't want to threaten our comfort level.

Discouragement is another way, by our doing nothing. We withdraw from life, and let sadness paralyze us. We find it easy to become so negative that we are difficult to understand, even by our friends. We frequently grow angry and allow ourselves to become bitter, instead of being energized by our passion. We complain endlessly about suffering, by blaming everyone but ourselves. Often God is included in our bitterness! There is nothing good, and little realistic hope of change.

Suffering is truly always dividing, revealing, and changing us. It can either deform us, or transform us, never leaving us the same. But, it can discourage and defeat us, just as it can also make us stronger and more open of mind and heart. What makes the difference? Our own personal response to suffering!

Pain on the other hand gets our attention, telling us that something is wrong, and change is needed. It is important that we don't allow pain to become our world view. Is there a better way, one that makes us strong and compassionate?

I would like to suggest a mantra that I have personally used often: "Receive, Accept, Return". When we receive, we acknowledge the pain and give up denial. I need to act! When I finally accept pain, I realize mine is neither the only pain, nor the worst pain. Return refers to my moving through the problem and getting me back to something I might call "normal". Normal is my comfort zone! Being in my comfort zone is not ever easy, but sure is more enjoyable!

Suffering and pain sometimes leads us to acclamations of anxiety. We can often feel God-less alone, needing help, and tempted to despair. This is the time to remember that the original cross-bearer (Jesus) was also not silent. His last words were "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!". These are words of hope. They are words we know and understand, because they are the words of Jesus. Making them our words is the challenge of our suffering and our faith. They are only understood by conflict and experiences.

These struggles are the heart of our human meaning and our life. To live is to have suffered; to live well is to have suffered faithfully. The crucifixion exhibit's the love God has for all of us here at St. Mary's. There can be no shadow without light, no cross without the Easter season. We fix our sight on the vision of Jesus dying and rising, which is our focus for life.

This is my fifth and final article on Pain and suffering, which takes us through lent and into the Easter Triduum. I hope we are now better prepared to enjoy this Easter season to its fullness.

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