

## From The Pastor

What about suffering? Why doesn't God heal or fix so much of the tragic suffering so many seem to endure? Why does Jesus have to suffer for the sake of our salvation?

Such questions come to mind as I ponder the opening verse of today's first reading. 'The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity', Is. 53:10. The reading is paralleled with the gospel in which Jesus refers to the 'baptism' he is to receive. This refers to his suffering and death on the Cross as the means of our redemption. The Cross is clearly a suffering, yet it serves the greatest good that has ever been accomplished.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Although very much longing for liberation and hoping for a just and righteous anointed one, Isaiah would not have imagined the kind of Christ that was given to the world. That is the power and insight of the first reading. Purely by the power of prophesy and inspiration, Isaiah speaks these words of a suffering servant.

Isaiah is revealing the power of redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering is a willing surrender to self sacrifice out of love for another\others for their good. Does God will this suffering? No. Does God use this suffering? Absolutely.

God does not intend for us to suffer. Suffering is simply part of the reality of what it means to be human. God does not want us to suffer. God does not send us suffering because of our sins. God does not send suffering as a punishment, or to make us better people, or to alert us to his presence should we forget Him.

The suffering servant described by Isaiah is clearly a prefigurement of Jesus. Why does this faithful, just man suffer? Such suffering, especially and uniquely in Jesus, is a willing yes; a surrender to the service of love. We all do this; it happens naturally without much thought. Parents are the best example. A mature parent willingly and without thought will do whatever it takes to free their child from any undue pain. It is a natural and spontaneous reaction of love. Often such care and attention is not only of great inconvenience, expense, and effort, but also of great emotional torment in desire to free the child of pain.

Consider this if you were God. God couldn't live with the pain and suffering of our sin. Our sin had caused us separation from God. As the Creator\parent, this was torment to the divine heart. As such, God was willing to do whatever was necessary to heal the separation between God and us. In the case of divine redemption, only the total giving and sharing of the whole self of God would accomplish the task.

To say that God was pleased to 'crush him in infirmity' doesn't quite capture the mood. God did not want Jesus to suffer anymore than a parent would want their child to suffer. Jesus, as Son of God and Messiah, willingly accepts the role and task of being the Savior, fully mindful of all that meant. This is what the Father loves and is pleased to accept from Jesus. Jesus is not forced by the Father to do something against his will. Jesus freely chooses to give his life for the redemption of all. The Father suffers with the Son in the work of our redemption. This is his Son, his only Son; the Son whom he loves. Yet, it is this love for the Son, and for all of us that motivates the action and necessity of the Cross.

We are NOT saved by the suffering. Suffering, of itself, never saved anyone. Love saves. Love heals. Love reconciles and unites what had been separated. Only by love is Jesus able to complete this act of suffering that redeems us and reunites us to the Father. Only by love are we able to persevere in the virtue of our own suffering for the sake of others. Ultimately, suffering becomes a part of the definition of love. No one truly loves another without knowing some pain. Love is self giving by nature. To truly love I must give up something of myself so as to honestly take in and receive the other as they are. In the case of Jesus, God totally empties Himself so that the alienation and separation caused by sin could be healed, literally consumed in the surpassing love of the Father for us through the Son.

Why through suffering? Why not some other way? God suffers because we suffer. Suffering is a reality and consequence of the incompleteness of our human condition. So much suffering is caused by our sin. To heal this sin and suffering, God comes in Christ to share in it; to take it onto himself through his human experience so that it can be reconciled through his divine nature of love. This is the second reading. [Jesus] 'a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness because he was similarly tested in every way, yet without sin'. Jesus accepts the human condition, taking into himself all human sin, bearing the pain of its suffering, and responding with a triumphant and victorious love. Love conquers sin and death. Love is our deepest nature in Christ that gives us the courage and trust to suffer in love for others. Be patient in trial; persevere in prayer. Be of good courage. He whom you serve is the Lord, who loves you.

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