



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
beholdthetruth.com



God Did Not Create Us to Suffer

- ❖ God created Adam and Eve, our first parents, impervious to pain and death.
- ❖ Suffering was invited into the world, though, when they turned their back on God.
- ❖ It may be said, then, that suffering is a creation not of God but of man.



Why Does God Permit Evil?

- ❖ Because of the separation from God caused by Adam and Eve's disobedience, all people must now endure suffering.
- ❖ This may cause us to question God's goodness and even His very existence.
- ❖ Yet God is good by nature and so incapable of causing evil.
- ❖ He does *permit* evil to occur, but always in order to bring about a greater good. Cf. Rom. 8:28



Christ's Perfect Prayer

- ❖ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest, the Lord Jesus gave us the perfect example of how to react when suffering comes.
- ❖ First asking the Father to spare Him from suffering, He then added, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” Luke 22:42
- ❖ To pray this prayer requires great trust in God’s goodness: that He truly knows what is best for us.



We Cannot See As God Sees

- ❖ To say, to the contrary, that God is unloving for allowing suffering is to judge Him from our limited human intellect.
- ❖ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” He might inquire of us. “Tell me, if you have understanding.” Job 38:4
- ❖ We simply cannot see all that God sees.
- ❖ We cannot comprehend all the hidden ways by which He uses adverse circumstances to steer the hearts of His children towards repentance and achieve spiritual perfection in us.



Transformation Process

- ❖ We must be transformed to enter into God's presence in Heaven, for "nothing unclean shall enter it." Rev. 21:27
- ❖ This sanctification process involves suffering.
- ❖ "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in the world will keep it for eternal life."
John 12:24-25



He Shall Wipe Away Every Tear

- ❖ Regardless of what sufferings we may be enduring now, or may endure in the future, we are comforted to know they are temporary—they will one day pass—and that the joy of Heaven is complete and everlasting.
- ❖ “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying in pain, for the former things have passed away.” Rev. 21:4



We Have Been Redeemed

- ❖ Christianity is set apart from all other religions in that it alone teaches that God became man, became one of us, to suffer and die for our sins.
- ❖ “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.” Isa. 53:5



Suffering for the Sake of Christ

- ❖ The human race was redeemed through the Passion of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ His suffering on our behalf, though, has not removed all the pain from our lives.
- ❖ To the contrary, Saint Paul declares, “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.” Phil. 1:29



Redemptive Suffering

- ❖ Christ's Passion has not taken away our own personal suffering, but transformed it.
- ❖ "In the Cross of Christ," wrote Pope John Paul the Great, "not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also *human suffering itself has been redeemed.*" *Salvifici Doloris* 19
- ❖ The sufferings which God allows to come into our lives, when offered in union with the sufferings of Christ on the Cross, take on a redemptive quality and may be offered to God for the salvation of souls.



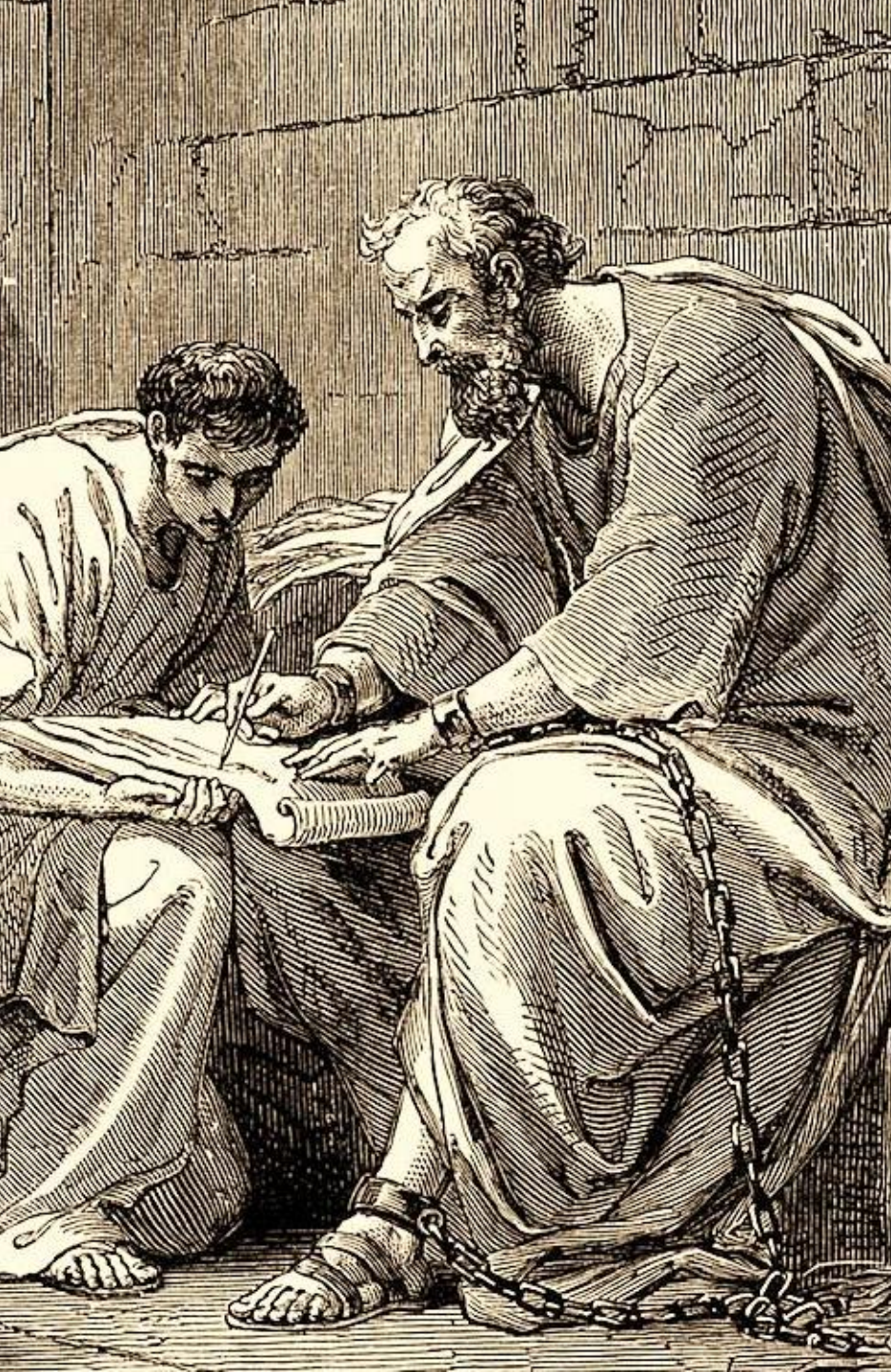
Redemptive Suffering

- ❖ For the followers of Christ, then, suffering is not devoid of purpose; remarkably, it is a means of obtaining God's grace.
- ❖ Pain is an instrument through which God may effect our sanctification, a way of spiritual pruning one might say.
- ❖ “For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”
Heb. 12:6-7



Redemptive Suffering

- ❖ “[The Father] disciplines us for our own good, that we may share in his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
Heb. 12:10-11



“In my flesh I complete what is lacking ...”

- ❖ Expressing the concept of redemptive suffering, Paul confesses, “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church.” Col. 1:24
- ❖ This does not imply, of course, that Christ’s Passion was in anyway insufficient.
- ❖ His Sacrifice on our behalf is perfectly complete and efficacious.
- ❖ Yet Jesus calls each of us to pick up our cross and follow Him; to intercede for one another, in imitation of Him, through prayer and suffering. Cf. Luke 9:23



Laying Down Our Lives

❖ “By this we know love,” writes Saint John, “that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16



Our Cooperation with Christ

- ❖ Jesus desires our participation in His salvific work not out of necessity but out of love, similar to how an earthly father looks to include his son in his activities.
- ❖ Our intercession for one another draws upon the power of the Cross, His exclusive work of mediation with God.
Cf. 1 Tim. 2:5
- ❖ All that we do depends upon what He has done and would be impossible apart from it.
Cf. John 15:5



Our Cooperation with Christ

- ❖ Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote: “In the world, on awakening in the morning I used to think over what would probably occur either pleasing or vexatious during the day; and if I foresaw only trying events I arose dispirited. Now it is quite the other way: I think of the difficulties and the suffering that await me, and I rise more joyous and full of courage the more I foresee opportunities of proving my love for Jesus.”



Our Cooperation with Christ

- ❖ “Then I kiss my crucifix and lay it tenderly on the pillow while I dress, and I say to him: ‘My Jesus, thou hast worked enough and wept enough during the three-and-thirty years of thy life on this poor earth. Take now thy rest. . . . My turn it is to suffer and to fight.’”

Counsels and Reminiscences



Suffering Without Christ

- ❖ While suffering in union with the Lord Jesus is hopeful, suffering apart from Him is bitter and empty.
- ❖ Thus, finding no value in suffering, the world runs from it, seeking to avoid it at all costs.



The Prosperity Gospel

- ❖ Evangelical preachers in the Word of Faith Movement, who promote the Prosperity (or “Health-and-Wealth”) Gospel, claim true believers will be healthy and rich.
- ❖ Kenneth Copeland, for instance, says, “God intends for every believer to live completely free from sickness and disease. It is up to you to decide whether or not you will.” *Welcome to the Family*
- ❖ Another Prosperity preacher, Robert Tilton, says, “Being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity!” Success-N-Life TV broadcast, December 27, 1990



The Prosperity Gospel

- ❖ The Bible, of course, refutes the teachings of this movement outright.
- ❖ When His disciples ask of the man born blind, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”, Jesus answers, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.”
John 9:2-3
- ❖ Elsewhere Jesus says, “Blessed are you poor Woe to you that are rich.” Luke 6:20, 24



Glory Without the Cross?

- ❖ When the Apostle Peter tempted Our Lord to forgo the Passion, Jesus responded, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.” Matt. 16:23
- ❖ Any attempt to obtain heavenly glory without the Cross is in its very nature demonic.



Glory Without the Cross?

- ❖ Near the end of his life, the same Peter, who had once been rebuked by Jesus for wanting Him to avoid suffering, declared to the faithful, “In this [heavenly inheritance] you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. 1:6-7



“By Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.”

- ❖ We must never lose sight of the prize: that one day, by the grace of God, we will see the Lord Jesus Christ in His Kingdom; behold His luminous face; hear His angelic voice; and kiss His sacred hands and feet, wounded for our sake.
- ❖ Till that day, let us proclaim unceasingly, “We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world. Amen.”
Saint Francis of Assisi, *The Way of the Cross*



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