

Marians of the Immaculate Conception and EWTN presents

The Divine Mercy Cenacle



LESSON NINE

Suffering

Human suffering is a mystery, but it is not without meaning. In the light of Christ's redemptive suffering and death human suffering acquires redemptive significance. As Christians out of love for each other we are called to alleviate human misery and suffering with both natural and supernatural means. Yet some forms of sufferings especially moral sufferings due do injustice, lack of faith, hope and love, rejection, abandonment, violence and hate are very hard to overcome. Emotional and spiritual pain may be with us for a long time. This type of suffering can be borne only in union with Christ and offered for the salvation of all especially those hardened by sin. When borne in this fashion even deep suffering will be transformed by God's grace into love and even joy.

Saint Faustina understood suffering in this way. She learned that suffering was a way to help her put aside all things and abandon herself to God. She suffered from tuberculosis and spent most of her time in convent infirmaries. She also endured resentment and cruel remarks from those around her. She likewise participated in Christ's suffering through the gift of internal, invisible stigmata — the wounds of Christ.

She wrote, "True love is measured by the thermometer of suffering. Jesus, I thank You for the little daily crosses, for opposition to my endeavors, for the hardships of communal life, for the misinterpretation of my intentions, for humiliations at the hands of others, for the harsh way in which we are treated, for false suspicions, for poor health and loss of strength, for self-denial, for dying to myself, for lack of recognition in everything, for the upsetting of all my plans.

"Thank You, Jesus, for interior sufferings, for dryness of spirit, for terrors, fears and uncertainties, for the darkness and the deep interior night, for temptations and various ordeals, for torments too difficult to describe, especially for those which no one will understand, for the hour of death with its fierce struggle and all its bitterness" (343*).

1. How does suffering fit into a message of joy?

The message of Divine Mercy given to St. Faustina is one of joy and hope. God's love and mercy for us is unfathomable, and no human mind will ever be able to comprehend it. We are all called to be Christ-like as we traverse the earth as pilgrims on a journey to holiness. This is easy when things are going well, and very difficult in times of suffering and adversity. Yet, we know that Our Lord calls us to pick up our cross and follow Him. Walking with Christ in the Spirit involves a life of humility, suffering, and spiritual poverty. These become more difficult as the road becomes more narrow, steep, and cobble-stoned. The role of redemptive suffering is a mystery, but uniting our sufferings to the Cross carries great spiritual value.

2. Can we use our sufferings for good? What is a “suffering soul”?

In the Morning Offering, we offer our prayers, works, and sufferings of the day in reparation for sin. All our “works” include our physical pain, mental duress, humiliations, rejections, and disappointments. The monotony of each day’s routine can be a form of suffering. One dreadful form of suffering is watching others suffer, especially family members or close friends. We know that offering up our suffering is possible, for St. Paul wrote, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and 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).

As Eucharistic Apostles, we ask that people offer up their sufferings for the ministry: to spread the truth of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, to propagate the message of Divine Mercy to a hurting world, and to build up the Church through works of mercy. Suffering has redemptive value, and many people suffer. We ask people to unite their sufferings with Jesus on the Cross for their personal intentions, but especially for the priests and brothers of the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception and all their work throughout the world.

3. As followers of Christ, can we avoid suffering?

We live in a valley of tears, and all of us will suffer in one form or another. We know we are to be Christ-like, yet, we avoid suffering. Jesus wants us to follow Him in His footsteps, telling us, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mt 16:24).

Saint Faustina understood the gift of suffering, and wrote, “If the angels were capable of envy, they would envy us for two things: one is the receiving of Holy Communion, and the other is suffering” (Diary, 1804).

4. How is love part of the equation of living mercy?

We can suffer with or without love. Saint Faustina suffered everything with joy, patience, and perseverance. Most of us do not suffer with love; rather, we suffer out of fear, anger, anxiety, and discouragement. For many, the fear of the cross is the greatest cross of all. We should try to suffer out of love of God, just as Jesus suffered out of love of us. We must suffer out of love, and love while we suffer. In suffering, we share in Christ’s suffering. The Catechism teaches us that:

By His loving obedience to the Father, “unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfills the atoning mission (cf. Is 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will “make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities” (Is 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19) (623).

5. Why does God allow suffering?

God does not want us to suffer, but He allows it, as there are consequences to our human nature. But God the Father gives us grace to endure it and persevere. Suffering is often a tool for conversion. Often a healing or cure occurs, but not in the way we had hoped.

The trials of life give us an opportunity, and often even force us, to question our relationship with God. Regarding trials, St. Faustina wrote, “Strangely, God sometimes allows them, but always in order to manifest or develop virtue in a soul. That is the reason for trials” (Diary, 166). He said, “My daughter, meditate frequently on the sufferings which I have undergone for your sake, and then nothing of what you suffer for Me will seem great to you. You please Me most when you meditate on My Sorrowful Passion. Join your little sufferings to My Sorrowful Passion, so that they may have infinite value before My Majesty” (Diary, 1512). The Catechism tells us: “Faith in God, the Father Almighty, can be put to the test by the experience of evil and suffering. God can sometimes seem to be absent and incapable of stopping evil. But in the most mysterious way God the Father has revealed His almighty power in the voluntary humiliation and Resurrection of His Son, by which He conquered evil. Christ Crucified is thus ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of

God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' It is in Christ's Resurrection and Exaltation that the Father has shown forth 'the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe'" (272).

6. How does being Christ-like involve suffering? How is Our Lady a perfect role model for us?

Our Lady suffered much, and unlike all the apostles except John, stayed at the foot of the Cross. She suffered when Jesus was lost in the temple, when she fled into Egypt, and when Simeon foretold that a sword would pierce her heart. We must remember that, if Jesus, as Head of the Church, suffered and was beaten and bruised on the road to Calvary, why should we as members of His Body be "revered and sprayed with a sweet-smelling perfume"? Our attitude to suffering should be that of Christ's; Scripture tells us that He was perfected through what he suffered. The Catechism teaches us to persevere in the midst of our suffering:

It is then we must turn to the witnesses of faith: to Abraham, who "in hope ... believed against hope"; to the Virgin Mary, who, in "her pilgrimage of faith," walked into the "night of faith" in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; and to so many others: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (165).

* References without a source listed with the number are taken from the *Dairy of Saint Maria Faustina*.



Marians of the Immaculate Conception

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