

From Fr. Yake's Desk – A Reflection on the Paschal Mystery

1. Instalment #3

Media reports of the consequences of isolation and social distancing due to COVID-19 have us view our situation negatively; all are victimized: unable to be with or hug family members and friends, confined as in jail, restricted movements, anxious about the unknown future, cut off from former routines, threatened financially, etc. The experts interviewed are chosen from the medical community to infer that the present circumstance is a dangerous threat to (mental) health. Might there not be a different way by which to understand present circumstances, a pastoral approach that can surface positive, spiritual elements of the moment?

That which cannot be denied is that people are suffering but suffering is assumed to be a bad thing. Sometimes pain alerts us to the presence of a threat, for example, we attend a physician when we notice symptoms of discomfort. Upon examination a serious illness may then be discovered and by being caught in time, cured. Often, the worse thing that can happen is that a life-threatening illness is painlessly asymptomatic and being so it may advance due to being undiscovered.

Echoing Thomas Merton's central thesis that was discussed previously (May 2) that, "Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul," Robert Wild, in his book exploring the mysticism G. K. Chesterton, *The Tumbler of God*, (2013) noted that, "One of the causes of our boredom is the belief that reality has just randomly been thrown together, without any rhyme or reason; or that it is like a machine that is getting old and rusty. If we believed that each color was the choice of a Great Artist, we would see everything with new eyes of wonder, as if we were looking at pictures in an exhibition." (p. 50) Wild cited Chesterton's view of the contemplative life that sees that creation is not a past event, "and is now simply 'lasting' like a machine running down. No, everything at every moment is coming forth from God." (p. 104) Yes, we are suffering but isn't that doing something? Just because we cannot engage in former activities should we assume that our present condition is meaningless?

The following presentation on the suffering dimension of the Paschal Mystery may be an opportunity to enable contemplation, to engage in (ascetical) mysticism that may have been neglected or avoided. We read, "But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2: 20-21)

We pray:

Father,

may we whom you renew in baptism

bear witness to our faith by the way we live.

By the suffering, death, and resurrection of your Son

May we come to eternal joy. (*The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. II, p. 809)

This prayer recognizes the value of Jesus' choice of suffering, not as incidental to his death, but deliberately chosen to express Christian spirituality.

Central to the mystery of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, is suffering. For example, we read, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him," (Hebrews 5: 8-10) When Ananias protested Jesus' request that he visit the blinded Saul of Tarsus that he might lay hands on him so that Saul may gain his sight Jesus indicated that Saul was his chosen instrument of evangelization, with the added comment, "... I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9: 16) Was Jesus being vindictive, wanting to punish Saul for persecuting the Church, or was he alluding to the normative faith journey that would mature Saul so he could become St. Paul?

On resurrection day when Jesus joined the disciples on the road to Emmaus he opened the scriptures with a rhetorical question, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24: 26) In his book, *Ministers of the Gospel: Meditations on St. Luke's Gospel*, Archbishop Carlo Cardinal Martini asked, "What does it mean to 'open up the scriptures'?" He explained, "It means putting the events of salvation – at which the disciples had been present without grasping their meaning – into the general context of salvation history which will make their meaning clear. ... The scriptures present us with God's plan for man in history, the gradual development of man's understanding of God, and the way of justice, truth and brotherhood. Jesus is presented as the culmination of this way and his Resurrection as the key to the whole plan, the explanation of all man's desires and man's continual aspiration to eternal life, justice, and truth – all of man's deepest thoughts and desires are thus lifted up to the level of the Spirit of Truth and given their true significance." (pg. 103) Note Cardinal Ambrozic's thought as previously quoted (April 15), "The resurrection makes us who we are." Fundamental to God's plan of salvation is suffering.

Suffering is necessarily sinners' way to enter into the divine plan because sin's influence to insist on an infatuation with self obstructs "justice, truth and brotherhood;" leaving sinful attachments behind is necessarily a painful process. In the light of man's fallen nature the resurrection provides sinners with needed incentive to struggle against sin. Such was St. Paul's logic, "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one." (1 Cor. 9: 25) At the heart of all atheism and rejection of Christianity is resistance to the truth of whom God is as St. John defined divinity, "God is love." (1 John 4: 8) Once persons affirm that the essential truth of their being is that God loves them this insight mandates that they abandon lesser affections. The only difference between a saint and a sinner is that a saint accepts to be loved by God and this acceptance means to suffer the loss of all other loves.

The Church has always esteemed martyrs, those faith-filled saints whose witness bravely accepted suffering, the second degree of humility, in order to share in the resurrection. Such suffering is redemptive and results in greater maturity in faith. Journalist and convert to Catholicism, Malcolm Muggeridge, expressed this mystery in his own life when he reminisced,

"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed

especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo, as Aldous Huxley envisaged in *Brave New World*, the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the Cross signifies. And it is the Cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.” (From Malcolm Muggeridge, *A Twentieth Century Testimony*. (Nashville, Toronto, New York: Thomas Nelson Inc.), 1978. In the reflection/chapter entitled “England-Robertsbridge, Sussex.”) And Jesus concurs. Note his revelation to St. Rose of Lima: “Let all know that grace comes after tribulation. Let them know that without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. Let them know that the gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase. Let them take care not to stray and be deceived. This is the only true stairway to paradise, and without the cross they can find no way to climb to heaven. (This quote attributed to Christ speaking to St. Rose of Lima is excerpted from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume IV, p. 1342.) That which is clear is that suffering is redemptive when it expresses love. (John 14: 15) but sinners, steeped in self-love, will always find suffering to be meaningless because they insist that their illusions are reality.

How might we view suffering from a positive and spiritual perspective? The following are notes that I made from two presentations on the meaningfulness of redemptive suffering that I have edited slightly: The first by Rev. Francis Carpinelli on *Suffering that Offers Hope* and the second by Dr. Janine Langan, *Cries of the Heart: God and the Mystery of Suffering*.

Carpinelli’s presentation began with Eli Weisel’s story: We pray not to suffer. The Rabbi asked: why is God interested in your prayer/suffering? God prefers our suffering to our work. For example, Jesus worked for three years but had to suffer (three hours) to save us. In St. Paul and the gospels it is recorded that the Messiah “had to suffer.”

What is the meaning of suffering according to our Christian faith?

Do we have to suffer? In scripture it is seen only in our relationship with God as a test; to test the disposition of our heart; e.g. Job. God lets us be tempted/tested (in Greek it is the same word). We need the theological virtue of hope when we are tested versus giving up on God.

1. Suffering strips us of power. In Original Sin we want to be like God whom we perceive to be powerful.

Christ too was tested (The Temptations in the Desert: Lk. 4) Christ suffered as a test of faith, hope, love, and he did not use his divine power over Satan’s. Adam and Eve’s sin was about power: independence, the ability to decide what is good and what is evil, to be like God. Therefore, the antidote to sin (the need for power) is suffering. All sin is a power ploy, a grab for power for self, God, or others. We enter heaven after trials.

Power is needed for control; to overcome what we need against our problems. Suffering as humility admits our powerlessness, that we cannot control situations.

2. A test of our theological virtues. We sin, not because we are bad, but because we cannot bear our suffering.

Jesus endured three temptations in the desert (Lk. 4) and on the cross three times: 1. "Come down;" i. e. use your power; he used his power for the (good) thief. 2. He needs to surrender power in order to trust God; only God has power. He thus undoes the sin of Adam and Eve who want to take power away from God. 3. Endurance is the virtue needed to remain in suffering. St. Catherine of Siena is recorded as saying, "Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring." Without suffering, God and we would not know how much we love God. Our freedom needs to be tested. Like a student, the test indicates how much is known. We don't know how much faith, hope, and love we have for God if it is not tested.

Therefore, God does not like suffering or want us to suffer but he has to test us. So endurance is vital, as for example in our commitments like marriage. Our endurance is our hope. We take food (Eucharist and the world) from God to live and this is a great good. In relation to life our suffering does not mean anything. We take life (food) from God in order to live. If suffering indicates love, faith, and hope we need suffering: "Take up your cross and follow me." The remedy for sin is suffering; not to have power but to trust only in God who has power.

3. Suffering is an occasion to regain our spiritual vision; what God wills.

Suffering is the cure for original sin. The human desire to be like God can only be healed by stripping ourselves of power, Adam and Eve's sin. They took food that God did not give versus food that he gave. Suffering is powerlessness that tests our virtue. The greatest loss of Original Sin is the loss of vision/perception; we see according to selfish motives versus as God sees. We lose grace's work, the beauty of creation, grace in history, love of things of God, egotism is unspiritual vision, disinterest in things of God (impurity of heart). The pure of heart see God. Purity is not to have a hidden agenda, innocence of heart, no lie between heart, words, actions; i. e. like children. Note for example, the Venerable Carlo Acutis at the age of fifteen, dying of leukemia in 2006, offered his suffering for the Pope and the Church.

Suffering enables us to see God's way in things. Persons become spiritual when they suffer; e.g. in tragedies like war, 9-11, mass shootings of the innocent, etc. Sin clouds perception because we see what we want to see. Only before God do we see ourselves as we are: children to God (dependent). E.g. The Book of Job: The three (religious) visitors using their religious views insist that Job sinned. (Job 31) He challenges God to say if he sinned. Job is pious but his heart is not pure. (Job 32) He admits his error and repents of sin. Therefore suffering makes us see who we are before God. It makes it possible for us to see reality. Sin compels us live in unreality. According to C. G. Jung: 1. (minor) disappointments in life, and 2. (major) symbolized in myth/Bible/dreams by sword and blood destroy our pretensions; e. g. death. School may

prepare us for 1., 2. See Gal. 2: 20. E. g. Lk. 2: 35; Simeon tells Mary about the sword to pierce her (and Jesus') hearts. Suffering cuts through our illusions.

4. Suffering enables us to align our reality to that of God.

All need the minor suffering in order to pass successfully to death, 2. the major suffering, in order to be aligned with God's way, to be in holy communion, align our reality with God. In love we give power to the lover. On the cross Jesus surrenders power and does not exercise power over us, but he loves us. God will not use his power for us but his grace/love is enough. When St. Paul asked that his suffering, his "thorn in the flesh," (perhaps poor eyesight according to the Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen) be removed, Jesus replied that not only is his grace enough but God's strength is made perfect in weakness. (1 Cor. 12: 9) Suffering enables us to see God. God allows suffering so we can align ourselves with God's being. E. g. in the West we want to live in a world of our making not a world of God's creating. We pray, ... "for thine is the kingdom, the power ..." Adam and Eve would not worship God; would not let God be God.

5. Suffering purifies the soul and makes us open to grace. We need God; e. g. Job who was pious but still a sinner who needed grace.

Sacrament means mystery, secret, the down payment of salvation and the secret of salvation is Holy Communion where we enter into the secret of God, bliss, and beatitude. Holiness comes from intimacy with God not from our works. The suffering prefer the pain that has them share the secret of God rather than have it removed. Suffering is joy when one has God's secret. Therefore, learn to suffer and you will be able to suffer.

Dr. Janine Langan addressed the issue of suffering that tests the disposition of our heart; i. e. do we love God for himself or just for his gifts? She questioned, what is at stake for us in this mystery of inescapable suffering. For Jesus it is a gift; "The cup my Father gave me." How to understand it? Here are her insights:

1. Suffering stops our lives of striving and possessing and of making a success out of our lives. We see the fragility and emptiness that they really are; quick substitutes to problems, perhaps. We discover a new self when we suffer. It blocks the superficial cover of earthly success. It is the first layer of the onion that is stripped away. So suffering comes as liberation as we see our real self versus the self-made entity. (This was an insight of Thomas Merton who suggested that we 'clothe our nothingness' with that which is acceptable to our cultural values; so we become conformists who abandon our true self.) Suffering reveals that we are just human like everyone else. It is an experience of human solidarity. In suffering we discover the "failure of success," of the nothingness of ourselves. I need to deconstruct myself, my accomplishments, to be simply with you. But suffering may either untie us or crush us. What is left when the onion is stripped completely away? (This is what Carmelite saints Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross meant by the Dark Night where we have the opportunity to exchange our nothingness (nada) for Christ's life (toda). The deepest real self: Christ. Me, without my ego, is a better self. It affirms the first Beatitude; Blessed are the poor....

2. Weakening to the universal presence of pain. In French *mal* means bad/evil. We grasp the truth of evil that is pain. They are linked and we are part of that reality, for we respond to both as both cause and effect. E. g. The Nazi concentration camps presented a challenge to inmates to live in freedom, with nobility, generous and loving under these conditions of pain. (see Viktor Frankl) Those who did gave hope to others to stand up against evil. It is to experience humanity. So God did not err but made something wonderful: our freedom to love. (see the Book of Job)

3. Being a gift, a trial, so we do not want it: Jesus prayed, "Take this cup from me, and "Lead us not to the test." Only Christ who taught us how to receive the gift could receive it so that it expressed its gift dimension. We pray, "Don't try me," for I may go the wrong way; i. e. *mal*.

Because we are the same, my suffering reveals me to myself but also to others. It is important to suffer well, that is, to be human in the experience. We try to send suffering back, to avoid it, and that is why evil multiplies. We react by assigning blame, suing, etc versus accepting our portion of suffering. E. g. avoiding work that needs to be done imposes it upon others, like, for example, disposing of your own Tim's cup versus disrespecting the beauty of the natural environment with litter that someone else will have to pick up. Suffering accepted evaporates evil and is thus a redemptive act, suffering without revenge stops evil's spread. So Christ stayed on the cross and forgave his torturers.

As gift suffering brings out the truth of our self/personality. The Beatitude, "Blessed are those who weep," i. e. when you suffer do you know, are you aware of life surging in you? It is God's promise to those who suffer and so suffering is not a torture but a gift! It is also a great mystery that is linked to glory, joy, and love. The "glory of God;" e. g. Christ revealed God's glory as the greatest success of creation; i. e. the human being is fully self in suffering. It is the most powerful manifestation of human (and God's) freedom that is revealed in the face of oppression. E.g. *The Matrix*, presents a perfect world but it became boring (note Malcolm Muggeridge's insight above) so it needed suffering to make life good. E.g. the Buddha searches for joy *via* the encounter with suffering. Therefore, there is a link between joy and suffering; they are two sides of the same coin.

4. Suffering makes us aware that we want more. E. g. Job, after he stops blaming God, notices, recognizes, the suffering of the poor; "the whole of creation seeks the freedom of the sons of God." (St. Paul) All creation suffers evil and as sufferers we are responsible and can alleviate suffering. The awareness that the world is not running very well, but that we are responsible to transform it to experience joy; the God-given self. E. g. our little sacrifices, to suffer voluntarily for those who must suffer brings one to peace of heart.

Conclusion:

We depend on the gift of eternal life *via* a meeting with God. Suffering cannot be faced alone but accepted and living it in union with Christ and humanity, Church, for the sake of the freedom of God is hope for eternal life.

In North America we do not deal well with suffering. We need to respect it as a mystery and gift. We try to find answers, to manage pain, to understand why this happens, or the media display it as entertainment. It is all a failure to respect its transcendent dimension or those who suffer.

a. Suffering needs the respect as the promise of blessedness that reveals our freedom. The truth is that God feeds you and makes you blessed by the gift of suffering. Suffering makes you blossom. For Job it was his entrance into the divine life.

b. The response to others' suffering should not be to explain or blame, just to be there. E. g. Mary at the passion of her son; to be with all of humanity that suffers. This was also the conclusion of Rabbi Harold Kushner's book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

Communion with those who suffer. It is life in this world and therefore let's do it with love. There is no way out, only a way through. (Christ shows us)

Suffering well-lived opens us to eternal life. God is present in the suffering. We are carried if we lovingly go through it without rebellion. God is at the end of it and so it's liberation.

We try to love/serve but often our heart is cold. In suffering we realize a changed heart, an experience of love, a tangible proof of God's presence!

Why is often our question in the face of suffering. It is a mystery (why this mess and we are still capable of God?) The real question is: What do we do with it? Job did not ask why but he protests, "I am noble," remaining human/good so he rejects his detractors who want to blame him. Job appeals to God for affirmation, "I am still Job, worthy of love, respect, compassion but I was wrong to mistreat the rabble." Therefore the world is not just. How do I remain Job (righteous) in this harsh circumstance? He is innocent but he suffers. He suffers because God wants to prove that man is the greatest creature who needs God and is with God regardless of suffering.

Where does suffering lead? Suffering cannot be explained but we may see its effects. Job grows up, matures. For John of the Cross re Job: suffering is God's gift of righteousness.

2. Sunday Mass at Martyrs' Shrine now online

Sunday Mass in the Church of St. Joseph is now online.
www.martyrs-shrine.com/mass.

3. See The Catholic Register newsletter@catholicregister for May 4 for an article on loneliness by a religious woman who has been a hermit for 35 years.

4. In this month of May the Church especially honours the Blessed Virgin Mary. We are encouraged to pray the rosary as it has been recognized as a powerful prayer in perilous times. The *Living With Christ* missalette for October 2019 offered a brief history of the memorial, "Our Lady of the Rosary was celebrated in the late 15th century by some

confraternities of the Rosary, and in 1571 was solemnized by Pius V in thanksgiving for a battle victory. In 1716 Clement XI extended the feast to the universal Church.” (pg. 162)

5. A prayer to Mary that you might consider praying:

Prayer to The Lady of All Nations

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the Father,
send now Your Spirit over the earth.
Let the Holy Spirit live
in the hearts of all nations,
that they may be preserved
from degeneration, disaster and war.
May the Lady of all Nations
who once was Mary,
be our Advocate. Amen.

6. **From the Diocese**

"It is clear that we need to **stay home** following the directives and guidelines of the Premier and the Nova Scotia Chief Medical Officer of Health, as well all official advisories from our federal and provincial governments ... As a people of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit we will get through this together."

- Bishop Wayne Kirkpatrick

As a result of the growing public health crisis posed by the Covid-19 virus, all public celebrations of Masses and events remain cancelled until further notice, and churches, parish offices and diocesan offices remain closed to the public.

For Bishop Kirkpatrick's letters, updates, links to online/television Masses and other information on Covid-19:

<http://www.antigonishdiocese.com/index.php/covid-19>

We hold Gerald Odo and his family and friends in prayer
following his death on Tuesday, April 28.

Gerald was the husband of Winnie Odo, the Diocesan Chair of Development and Peace.
Eternal rest grant upon them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.

Nation-wide Prayers for Priests

Now through June 19

Across Canada, under the sponsorship of the of the Sacred Heart Evangelization and Healing Ministry in the Archdiocese of Halifax- Yarmouth, daily prayers and a Rosary for Priests are being offered for our priests. Prayers are being offered May 1 through June 19, ending with the Global Rosary Relay for Priests.

For more information: <https://www.worldpriest.com/annual-global-rosary-relay/>

Development and Peace-Caritas Canada and Covid-19 in Haiti

As the Covid-19 virus spreads throughout the world our partners in vulnerable countries with poor health infrastructure continue their work while also practising enhanced hygiene and social distancing and distributing vital information on the pandemic.

In Haiti as of March 28, 2020, 15 cases had officially tested positive. Development and Peace's partners in the field introduced some measures in their areas of intervention, like washing hands with soap and chlorinated water in all our partners' offices. Upon the identification of the first two Covid-19 by national authorities on March 19, each partner organization took steps to reduce human contact. All training sessions planned for various projects were systematically cancelled.

The PAPAYE PEASANT Movement (MPP) has even initiated an activity to produce a hand sanitizer-type product and established a special schedule to reduce the number of people visiting its office. The community radio station that D&P partners are operating has adopted special programming to sensitize the people of the Central Plateau region about the pandemic.

Officials of the Animation and Social Communication Society (SAKS) and the Haitian Women's Community Radio Network (REFRAKA) are maintaining phone contact with

the members of their community radio station networks.

The PROCLIMA project, another D&P partner project that assists small-scale farmers, has continued distributing seedlings for agroforestry gardens and cuttings to vegetable gardens. Agricultural field activities have continued because they did not require the presence of too many people at one spot. The work is generally carried out by small groups of planters whose workspaces are far apart from one another.

Read more on www.devp.org