



Journey to Joy!

Healing for Life's Sorrows

Part 5: "Suffering and God's Plan"

[**Click Here for Lesson 5 Video**](#)

Theme: God can use our sufferings as the means through which He can work great wonders for us and others.

Grace: I pray for the grace to cooperate with God's plan for me in the midst of all things - even suffering.

From a Prayer of St. Bonaventure

O Christ, I glance again at Your bloodstained face,
and I raise my tear-filled eyes to see Your wounds and bruises.
I lift my contrite, afflicted heart, to consider all the tribulations
You have endured in order to seek me and to save me.

O meek Lord and Savior of the world, how can I thank You worthily?
I want You to rule over me, just as You are, in Your Passion. I want to set You as a
Seal upon my heart, as a seal on my arm, to make me conformable to You and
Your martyrdom in all I think and do.

O good and gentle Jesus! You who gave Yourself to us
As a ransom for our redemption, Grant that we, unworthy though we be, May
correspond with Your grace, Entirely, perfectly, and in all things. Amen

Praying with Sacred Scripture Every Day

Like Lectio Divina, Lectio Visio becomes a way of entering more deeply into our time of prayer. While Lectio Divina invites us to listen for the voice of God as we prayerfully and contemplatively read Sacred Scripture or some other holy writing, Lectio Visio invites us to the same experience except by gazing upon a holy image.

With this in mind, come before an image of Jesus on the Cross. You may choose a Crucifix, a statue of Jesus on the Cross, a painting or picture of Him there. Recollect yourself (see Lesson Part 4). Then meditatively pray the "Prayer From St. Bonaventure."

Remember, Jesus is with you. He hears you. He loves you. He wants to take you into the joy and mystery of His suffering. This is a holy moment. Open your heart to receive all He wants to give you. Rest in Him. Mary is with you at the foot of the Cross. Let her enfold you in her mantle.

Read the Scripture passage for the day and gaze upon Jesus' Act of Love for you as you meditate on it. Afterward, be sure to write down any thoughts and inspirations you receive for the Scripture passage you are contemplating.

Daily Passages for Meditation:

Day 1: Hebrews 13:5

Day 2: Romans 8: 37-38

Day 3: 1 Peter 5:10

Day 4: 2 Corinthians 4:8

Day 5: 1 Corinthians 1:18

Day 6: 1 Peter 2:24

Day 7: Matthew 11:28-30



Going Deeper

Throughout Church history many great saints and sacred writers have given us profound insights and reflections on the value of suffering. In our own time, we have been blessed by the wisdom and insight of many and, chief among them perhaps, is St. John Paul II. In his stunning encyclical, *Salvifici Doloris*, he inspires, edifies, and enlightens the Faithful about the mystery of redemptive suffering. Following is an excerpt from this encyclical. Prayerfully read it, stopping and pondering along the way. Once completed, answer the questions that follow.

Saint Paul speaks of such joy in the Letter to the Colossians: *"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake."* A source of joy is found in the overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself.

The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions;" the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters.

Therefore, he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls.

Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption. In that "cosmic" struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil, spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians, human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, constitute a special support for the powers of good, and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers.

1. Have you ever felt useless in a time of challenge? In a time of great suffering? St. John Paul II tell us that, *"This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others."* Why do you think this is so? In what way did you feel consumed by the suffering and seeming uselessness of it all?
2. St. Peter warns us to *"Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). How does this relate to what the Holy Father is expressing above?

Going Deeper Continued

3. The evil one often preys upon those who are suffering because of their vulnerability. Three tactics are his favorites: Doubt, Discouragement, and Deception. Have you ever experienced these attacks during a time of trial? How did you respond? Are you experiencing one or more of them now? How can you best appropriate the words of St. John Paul to this current struggle?
- 4 How can the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ become a weapon to battle each of the three D's the enemy seeks to wage against us?
5. Why is suffering in union with Christ an irreplaceable service... indispensable for the world's salvation?" Read the last paragraph again. What impact does this have on you in light of your current suffering? What is Jesus saying to you through it?

*Note: For the entire Encyclical, go to www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html

Words of Wisdom from Saints-in-the-Making

Prayerfully read and ponder the following two quotations and journal your insights, intimations, and reflections. Then respond to the question that follows the quotations.

"Who does not know that in this world are things both good and bad? If there were nothing but good, love with its train of joy and peace would be enough to put our souls in order. But as we know very well, there are also evils about us. And if love is for the purpose of putting our souls in order with respect to good things, sorrow has been given to us to order our souls with respect to evil. For sorrow has been sanctified and divinized by its contact with Jesus."

Archbishop Luis Martinez, The Sanctifier

"[Jesus], in his sacred humanity, could suffer no more; he could not be wounded or die any more; his life had become peace, joy, the absolute power of consummated love, which completely passes our understanding and our realization; he gives us that life of joy. He gives that joy and peace to be at the very heart of our suffering, to make suffering and joy, for us as it was for him, not two things incompatible with each other, but just one thing, love - and he gives us his own power of consummated love to use for one another, to comfort and heal and restore one another; even, in a mysterious sense that those who have really known sin and sorrow and love will understand, to raise one another from the dead."

Caryl Houselander, The Risen Christ

In light of the words given to us by Archbishop Martinez and Caryl Houselander, consider: God has given you life at this moment in the history of man. To you, He has entrusted a portion of His cross to you presented through the struggles, trials, sorrows, sufferings, reversals and set-backs of life - large and small. Given the world's situation and current events, how can you make a difference? To what extent are you willing to make this your mission? According to St. John Paul II, what would be the benefit to you personally and to the world at large?

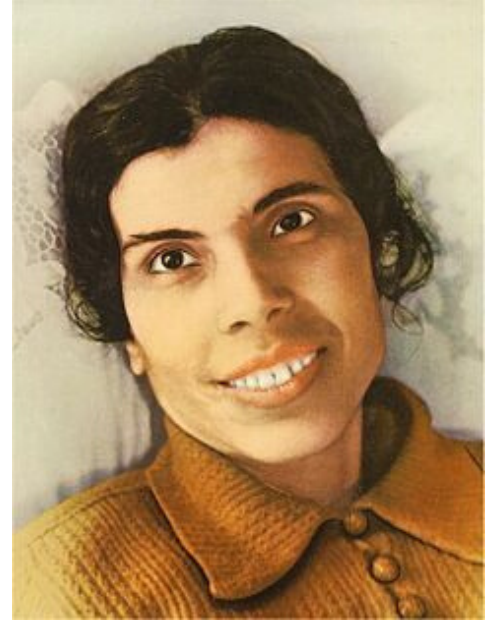
A Glance Back and A Look Forward

Refer back to Lesson 4. Listen again to the The Healing Meditation: St. Mark's account of the Passion. Then refer to your response to question 4. To what extent does the teaching for this session, as well as the information in this current lesson, alter your perspective of the sufferings you identified? How do they help you to "Bear the Pain and "Give A Moral Gift" in the Forgiveness process if your suffering is related to the actions of another?

A Saintly Witness

Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa (1904-1955)

It was Holy Saturday in 1918 in the Portuguese village of Balasar when three young girls were sewing together at home. Without warning, three men burst through the front door and attempted to sexually assault them. In an attempt to escape the men, one of the girls, 14 year-old Alexandrina Maria da Costa, threw herself out the window. She fell 13 feet to the ground and suffered extensive injuries to her spine which eventually result in complete paralysis.



Alexandrina could have devolved into rage and resentment but instead, she clung to her faith. Until she could no longer do so, she was often seen dragging herself through town to the church where she would sit hunched over in prayer, much to the amazement of the parishioners. But five years after the accident, even this small comfort was denied her as the paralysis worsened until she could no longer get out of bed.

For years, Alexandrina pleaded for a cure but the paralysis remained. Gradually, the desire for recovery died in her and she began to think only of loving God. She found her thoughts often straying to the Blessed Sacrament in the nearby church until one day she realized that Our Lord was a prisoner in the tabernacle just as she was imprisoned in her paralysis. From that time on, she endeavored to remain with Him in spirit, in unceasing prayer, to console His Sacred Heart and obtain the conversion of sinners.

Little by little, God helped her to see that suffering was her vocation and that she was being called to serve as a "victim soul." Her call was to open the eyes of others to sin, invite them to conversion and offer a living witness of Christ's passion. The more she understood this mission, the more she embraced it.

"Our Lady has given me an even greater grace," she once said. "First, abandonment, then complete conformity to God's will and finally, the thirst for suffering."

A Saintly Witness Continued

In 1933, another great grace was extended to her. The parish priest decided to come to Alexandrina's home and celebrate Mass in her humble room. Shortly after this great privilege was extended to her, Jesus appeared to her for the first time. He looked just as he did moments after being taken down from the cross, bloodied and beaten. Uniting her suffering to His, she began to have regular visions of Our Lord. From 1938 until 1942 she lived the three-hour "passion" of Jesus every Friday, having received the mystical grace to suffer as He did. During those hours, her paralysis would disappear, and she would relive the Stations of the Cross even though her movements were accompanied by excruciating pain.

Beginning in 1934, she was also assailed regularly by demons in the form of hideous visions and howlings, blasphemous taunts that God had abandoned her and temptations to commit suicide in order to escape her paralysis. Once again, grace sustained her, and this time of trial ushered in a new phase of her mystical life. Beginning in 1942, she began to exist on nothing but the Eucharist. Weighing only 73 pounds, medical doctors were baffled by the phenomenon and began testing her, sometimes behaving cruelly toward her.

In the midst of these sufferings and humiliations, Jesus told her, "You will very rarely receive consolations... I want that while your heart is filled with suffering, on your lips there is a smile." Alexandrina obeyed and all who saw her found only a joyous and smiling woman who emitted peace to all who came in contact with her.

Her frail body finally gave out on October 13, 1955. Even though racked with pain, she joyfully cried out "I am so happy! So happy because I am going to heaven at last!" And then, in a final admonition to the world, she said "Do not sin. The pleasures of this life are worth nothing. Receive Communion, pray the Rosary every day. This sums up everything."

Those who suffer can always count on the heavenly help of Blessed Alexandrina. Two years before she died, the Lord Himself reassured "If anyone should invoke your name when you are in Heaven, they will never do so in vain." Alexandrina was beatified on April 25, 2004 by Pope John Paul II.

Faith in Action

Blessed Alexandrina had every reason to blame the world for her sorry lot in life. But instead, she turned to God and allowed His grace to give her the strength to not only accept her disabilities, but to use them for the good of the world. Is there some suffering in your life that, with God's grace, you can offer for someone's good? It is interesting that Alexandrina died on the feast day of the last apparition of Fatima. Consider her admonition to the world in light of this fact. How can your suffering be a prayer? How can it help you enter more deeply into the mysteries of the Rosary?

Words to Grow By

Expiation - the act of making satisfaction or reparation for an offense, atonement, reparation. early 15c., *expiacioun*, from Latin *expiationem* (nominative *expiatio*) "satisfaction, atonement," noun of action from past-participle stem of *expiare* "make amends for, atone for; purge by sacrifice, make good," from *ex-* "completely" (see *ex-*) + *piare* "propitiate, appease," from *pius* "faithful, loyal, devout" (see *pious*). -etymonline.com

Victim Soul - A person specially chosen by God to suffer more than most people during life, and who generously accepts the suffering in union with the Savior and after the example of Christ's own Passion and Death. The motive of a victim soul is a great love of God and the desire to make reparation for the sins of mankind. - www.catholicculture.org

For more on victim souls, go to: www.simplycatholic.com/what-is-a-victim-soul/

In Closing

"As for me, I have always placed the greatest trust in the Blessed Virgin. Love this good Mother. Abandon everything to her, entrust everything to her... Let us follow Mary and, with her, climb up to Calvary in the steps of our kind Savior. Let us remain with her at the foot of the Cross."
- Blessed Marie Rivier

Dearest Mother Mary,

I am weak and small and in need of a mother. Be near me in all the circumstances, sufferings, and travails of my life. Never leave my side. Hold me fast under the cross of your Son when the weight of life presses hard. And when the hour of my death comes, may it be you who safely leads me home. Amen.