

Throughout this Lenten season, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has forced all of us, in one way or another, to reflect on the reality of *suffering* in our lives — how we choose to understand it and cope with it. For those without faith, suffering has no purpose and is something to be avoided at all costs, but in the light of the Gospel we see that suffering is inseparable from our salvation and sanctification in Christ our Crucified Lord.

“For unto this are you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps. ... Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you. But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (1 Pet. 2:21, 4:12-13)

Today’s meditation from *Divine Intimacy* by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen (1893-1953), entitled, “The Value of Suffering”, offers a powerful and providential reflection for these unusual times in which we find ourselves — unusual, not so much because of the novel coronavirus itself, but more so due to “[t]he drastic and disproportionate security measures with the denial of fundamental human rights of freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and freedom of opinion [that] appear almost globally orchestrated along a precise plan,” in the [words](#) of Bishop Athanasius Schneider. And much worse, the fact that the vast majority of the Church’s shepherds have offered no resistance whatsoever to such measures, which deprive the faithful of access to the sacraments.

During these final two weeks of Lent, may all of Christ’s faithful strive to enter deeply into His saving Passion and thus experience the truth of St. Paul’s words: “To them that love God, all things work together unto good” (Rom. 8:28).

127. The Value of Suffering

By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

1. The Passion of Jesus teaches us in a concrete way that in the Christian life we must be able to accept suffering for the love of God. This is a hard, repugnant lesson for our nature, which prefers pleasure and happiness; however, it comes from Jesus, the Teacher of truth and of life, the loving Teacher of our souls, Who desires only our real good. If He commends suffering to us, it is because suffering contains a great treasure.

Suffering in itself is an evil and cannot be agreeable; if Jesus willed to embrace it in all its plenitude and if He offers it to us, inviting us to esteem and love it, it is only in view of a superior good which cannot be attained by any other means — the sublime good of the redemption and sanctification of our souls.

Although man, by his twofold nature, is subject to suffering, God willed to exempt our first parents from it by their preternatural gifts; but through sin, these gifts were lost forever, and suffering inevitably entered our life. The gamut of sufferings which has harassed humanity is the direct outcome of the disorder caused by sin, not only by original sin, but also by actual sins. Yet the Church chants: *O happy fault!* Why? The answer lies in the infinite love of God which transforms everything and draws from the double evil of sin and suffering the great good of the redemption of the human race. When Jesus took upon Himself the sins of mankind, He also assumed their consequences, that is, suffering and death; and this suffering, embraced by Him during His whole life, and especially in His Passion, became the instrument of our redemption. Pain, the result of sin, becomes in Jesus and with Jesus, the means of destroying sin itself. Thus a Christian may not consider pain only as an undesirable burden from which he must necessarily recoil, but he must see in it much more — a means of redemption and sanctification.

2. Suffering is the disagreeable feeling which we experience when something — a situation, a circumstance — does not correspond to our inclinations, our needs, or our hopes, which does not harmonize with them or gratify them. Whereas all men are subject to this misery, the Christian alone possesses the secret of accepting it into his life without destroying the harmony or the happiness which he can enjoy on earth. This secret consists precisely, for a Christian, in attuning all kinds of suffering to his personal aspirations, which, for him, can never be limited to an ideal of earthly happiness. This harmony is possible, for that which appears to be opposition and disagreement from one point of view, often turns into profit when seen in a different light. Thus, for example, physical suffering, cold, hunger, illness, while unpleasant to the body, can be very useful for the attainment of a moral or supernatural good, such as the acquisition of virtue, or progress in holiness. If, from a purely human viewpoint, some sufferings seem inopportune and useless, they are never so when regarded supernaturally. “To them that love God, all things work together unto good” (Rom. 8:28). Even the greatest calamity, private or public, can become a precious and most effective means of elevating the soul. Every kind of suffering can then be made conformable to the highest ideals of the Christian: eternal salvation, sanctity, the glory of God, the good of souls. But this congruity is impossible without love; or rather, it will be possible only in proportion to our love, for it was by love alone that Jesus transformed the Cross, a terrible instrument of torture, into a most efficacious instrument for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. It is the same for us: charity, the love of God and of souls, will enable

us to accept any kind of suffering, harmonizing it with our loftiest aspirations. In this way, suffering finds a place, a very important place, in our life, without destroying our peace and serenity. On the contrary, our spirit is dilated under an increasingly generous inspiration, unto an ever greater love. As a result, we shall be happy, even while we are experiencing pain. Behold how Jesus has transformed suffering; behold the value conferred on it by His Passion.

Text taken from [Divine Intimacy](#) (Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 362-363.