

Suffering by Fr Richard Aladics

Human suffering is derived from evil. It is an intensely personal experience which we cannot transfer to another person. We rarely admit the depth of our suffering to anyone. Suffering affects people in different ways depending on how they use it; some can be crushed by it, others will grow as people because of it. Suffering comes in many forms, psychological, spiritual, physical and emotional and is almost always endurable.

Who suffers?

Suffering is part of human history; it is part of the life of every person. Everybody suffers; young and old, rich and poor, believers and non-believers, the healthy and the infirm.

Why do we suffer?

There are two places where suffering is illuminated. Human beings are themselves the "unwritten book" on suffering and secondly, the Bible is the "great book" about suffering.

Although suffering can seem to contradict the meaning of life and to intimidate us, it nevertheless demands our attention. Our experience of suffering, whether our own or that of someone else, usually inspires in us an attitude of compassion and respect, and the desire to help and protect. Suffering, whilst being linked to evil can inspire goodness. At a human level, suffering is a mystery in which good and evil are strangely intertwined, but which we cannot resolve on our own.

Human suffering is well represented throughout the Bible, and the Old Testament tells us that God is not indifferent to it. Suffering is not caused by God, but he does allow it to happen that a greater good might arise. The Book of Job reveals how suffering can create the possibility of re-building goodness and virtue in the one who suffers. The hinge of this process is the person's openness to God. In other words, God shares in the experience of human suffering in order to bring about a transformation!

The Bible, in the New Testament, gives a radically new meaning to suffering: Christ, the Son of God, suffers and dies! In Christ's death, God shows how much he loves human beings and, in dying, Christ has opened up suffering to the power of God. Jesus Christ has definitively linked suffering to love. Suffering can now have the greatest possible value: it can be redemptive.

What should my attitude to suffering be?

I should be realistic because I am bound to encounter it. I should be hopeful since good can come out of it. If I am a Catholic then I am called to compassion at the suffering of another and to help in some way. If it is I who suffer, then I am called to discern God's love for me in the suffering: suffering with a merely human attitude will defeat me. Nor should I think that God has deserted me. No, Christ is with me and his suffering is not weakness but the power of God. My suffering can lead me to an interior encounter with Christ. Suffering can unleash God's love in me, leading me to a greater kind of love, a love that brings about my conversion, my purification, strengthening my relationships with others, especially with God. Christ conquers suffering with love.

Any other advice?

Beware, our culture causes and encourages suffering without offering advice or remedy. For instance, abortion, drugs, locked and empty churches are, in reality, signs of our suffering.

Followers of Christ have a mission in which even suffering is no obstacle - that of sharing in Christ's work of redeeming the world. Have you got a copy of the Gospels? You are called to embrace the sometimes difficult, yes, but great journey of holiness!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the necessity of suffering in this fallen world is unavoidable; to suffer willingly - by my own free choice, not reluctantly - is another story. Help my love for You increase to such a degree that I will be willing to suffer for You and with You. Your word makes it clear that You suffered out of love for me. May I embrace the cross daily, and suffer out of love for You and follow the example You left for me. May the Father's love for You and Your love for the Father so inspire my love for You and for the Father that my heart will expand, make more room for the Holy Spirit, and be more willing to suffer. May this suffering produce perseverance in my life. Help me to find meaning and value in suffering in the midst of a culture that has no tolerance for suffering, and avoids it at all costs. Help me not to waste suffering ... not to pass by opportunity, to share in Your work as redeemer of the world. I love You, Jesus ... Amen ...

U got to believe by Fr Stan Fortuna CFR
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