

# Meditation 5a

## Following Christ by “Taking up your Cross”

### The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Point I. Jesus miraculously healed people’s suffering to bring them faith.

- *Jesus joyfully announces His purpose in quoting and fulfilling at the same time the prophecy of Isaiah.*
  - “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Isaiah 61:1-2).
- *In Capernaum there were many cures performed as Jesus spoke and revealed how the Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled in Him.*
  - St. Luke says, “At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them” (Luke 4:40).
- *Jesus’ preaching and miracles form a unity.*
  - Jesus preaches and teaches based on the authority of Scripture, with His miracles confirming His words. Likewise, His words explain the meaning of the miracles.
- *Jesus’ miracles deal with alleviating human suffering and bringing faith to people.*
  - “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth”— he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this” (Mark 2:4-12).

- Right from the beginning of Jesus' ministry He showed how pain and suffering, sin and death, can be overturned by Him to bring us faith, hope, and the experience of God's love.

## Point II. Baptism gives us partnership in Jesus' sufferings.

- St. Paul told the Galatians, the baptized have "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).
- To the Romans and the Colossians, he tells them exactly how they put on Christ, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4; cf. Col 2:12).
- The Vatican II documents say, "...the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (Jesus' passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension) is offered to all men" (*Gaudium & Spes* 22). **(CCC 1227)**.
- *Through Baptism we have indeed really been made partners with God.*
  - In all the sacraments, there is a dying and rising, a sharing in Jesus' dying and rising, His passion, death, and resurrection. It is the easiest to see in baptism, but the other sacraments all allow us in a spiritual way to experience the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is how we are made His partners.
- *We have even been made Jesus' partners enabling us to share our pain and suffering with Him for something personally good and the good for others.*
  - In fact, Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first receivers" **(CCC 618)**. Jesus calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]", (Mt. 16:24). We are receivers too – of His life through baptism. We are His disciples who need to take up our cross and follow Him. Just following isn't enough.
- *Christ extended an invitation to the Apostles in the Agony of the Garden "to suffer" with Him.*
  - Their failure to "watch and pray," to "suffer with" Jesus in the midst of His agony was a lost opportunity of grace for them.
  - Peter learned from his failure. Later, he would write in one of his letters urging others, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also

suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps” (1Peter 2:21). The lesson Peter failed in at Gethsemane, became the object of guiding others toward a greater and essential relationship with Christ.

- *By taking up our cross and sharing with Jesus our pain and suffering we follow in His footsteps and live out our partnership with Him.*
  - This is what it means to be a co-redeemer: heeding Jesus’ command to follow in His footsteps by taking up our cross, sharing with Him our pain and suffering for our good and the good of others.
  - St. Paul told the Ephesians, “...follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up for us as an offering and a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God.” Our sacrifice is uniting ourselves to Christ through the sharing of our crosses.

### Point III. Jesus called His disciples to use suffering for their good and others.

What are some of the benefits of sharing our pain and suffering with Jesus, besides fulfilling the fact that He called us to do this?

- *Suffering can benefit us toward a greater partnership with Christ as His disciple.*
  - He is in us through the sacraments and wants us to bring everything that we are in our thoughts, actions, feelings, desires, weakness, defects and frailties to Him. “...Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion” **(CCC 1521)**.
- *Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to Him.*
  - “Illness can be used to search for the peace and love of God. God always has something to give us when we turn to Him” **(CCC 1500, 1501)**. As Jesus said in turning to God in prayer for something good, “What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:11)?
- *Suffering addressed through the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can save us.*
  - “By the sacred Anointing of the Sick (sacrament) and the prayer of the priests, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that He may raise them up and save them. And indeed, she

exhorts them to contribute to the good of the people of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and Death of Christ” **(CCC 1499)**.

- *Suffering can form us toward greater spiritual heights.*
  - St. Paul shows how one can become strong under duress, by uniting our suffering to Jesus. “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).
- *Suffering can purify us and make up for the debt of sins we have committed here on earth.*
  - “Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.” (St. Rose of Lima, cf. P. Hansen, *Vita mirabilis* (Louvain, 1668) **(CCC 618)**).
- *Suffering can build up the Church.*
  - “Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his Body the Church” (Col 1:24). What is lacking is not in Christ, but our failure to share our sufferings with Christ for a greater good.
- *Suffering can result in receiving the “fruits of the Spirit.”*
  - For St. Paul to say, “Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you,” is puzzling. How is that one can find joy in suffering? A hint of the answer is found in Galatians 5:22, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (This will be addressed in the next meditation later today.)

## Spiritual Exercise:

Spend some time reflecting on the pain and suffering you are presently undergoing. Write a list of things that you are struggling with as best as you can. The time to reflect is meant to help you be thoughtful about what you are undergoing, not lead to some morbid or depressing feelings. You can ask the Holy Spirit to aid you. There is purpose in this exercise. Your list will become your own personal “Litany of Pain.” Bring that list to our next meeting to learn how to move from a “Litany of Pain” to experiencing partnership with Christ, uniting your pain and suffering to Him for greater intimacy with Him. The other good end is a concrete way to receive the “Fruits of the Spirit.” You will learn how to use prayer to achieve this. It will be a way to turn pain and suffering into something holy and helpful.