



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



August 2020

Dear Friends for Life,

Embracing the Value of Redemptive Suffering

In a world of uncertainty and troubling times it can be difficult to entrust ourselves to the will of God, yet that is *exactly* what we must do. Whether it is a personal crisis at home or at work, a financial difficulty that threatens the security of one's family, a life-threatening illness or effects of the pandemic-related upheaval in our lives, we all endure suffering in some way.

In his apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope St. John Paul II emphasized that "...suffering seems to be, and is, almost *inseparable from man's earthly existence*."¹ In some ways, it can feel like a double dose these days!



In this beautiful letter, Pope St. John Paul II reminds us that suffering, the result of evil in the world, brings us to solidarity.² However, it can also put us at odds with God, or it can bring us to conversion.³

Suffering will always remain a mystery, but through it we can enter into a deeper consciousness of the "sublimity of divine love."⁴ Christ, Himself, entered fully into the experience of human suffering through His ministry on earth (healing the lame, curing the blind, etc.). But this was most profoundly realized in the ultimate sacrifice on the Cross, through which Human suffering reached its culmination and paid the price of our redemption. This was possible only because Christ's suffering was wonderfully linked to love.⁵ Knowing this sheds a whole new light on suffering:

If one becomes a sharer in the suffering of Christ, this happens because Christ *has opened his suffering to man*, because he himself in his redemptive suffering has become, in a certain sense, a sharer in all human sufferings. Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he *rediscovered them, through faith*, enriched with a new content and new meaning.⁶

¹ John Paul II, Pope. Apostolic Letter on The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering *Salvifici Doloris*, (February 11, 1984) §3. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html

² *Salvifici Doloris*, §7-8.

³ *Salvifici Doloris*, §9,12.

⁴ *Salvifici Doloris*, §13.

⁵ *Salvifici Doloris*, §16,18,21.

⁶ *Salvifici Doloris*, §20.

This is no secret. Jesus proclaimed, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily...” (The New American Bible, Luke 9:23) And in Acts, the disciples were encouraged to persevere: “It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) St. John Paul II, likewise reassures us: “Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share in *glory*.⁷

We are especially thankful for the reflection offered on this topic by Fr. Charles Mangano in this month’s newsletter. We should not forget the power of our suffering, particularly in a time when there seems so much of it. When we unite our suffering with the salvific suffering of Christ, by internal grace, suffering is transformed into salvation, a conversion to God, and a civilization of love.⁸ It is not useless⁹—unless we allow it to be wasted through discouragement and doubt.

In this same theme, it is with deep gratitude that I read and encourage you to read, the excellent letter most recently issued by Bishop Barres regarding recourse to mediums—a practice which completely undermines our trust in God, inadvertently invites further evil (therefore suffering) and usurps the power of redemptive suffering so readily available to us. You can find this document here: https://www.drvc.org/wp-content/uploads/Formatted_Mediums_and_the_Catholic_Faith_08_12_2020-1.pdf.

On a practical note, the **Novena of Surrender** is an invaluable prayer during challenging periods, especially when we want answers, control or specific outcomes. God knows what is best for us—*His Plan is perfect. And if you trust Him, He will not fail you.* This is not my promise to you, it is His.

Finally, during this Octave of the Feast of The Assumption, we are reminded of the singular example of the Blessed One who most perfectly accepted God’s will for her and humbly united her sorrows *at* the foot of the Cross. On Saturday (August 22), we celebrate the Queenship of Mary. Let us consider her example more deeply this year and reflect it in our own sufferings. Our Lady, Queen of Heaven and Earth, pray for us!

Take heart: “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weigh of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Cor 4:17-18)

Remember always, God loves you very much. The travails you may undergo now are part of His Plan—don’t waste them, embrace them!

God bless you


Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

⁷*Salvifici Doloris*, §22.

⁸*Salvifici Doloris*, §26.

⁹*Salvifici Doloris*, §27.