

# Suffering – an Advent Study



## Session 2. The Suffering of Christ

### Read these Quotations

*“Christ drew close above all to the world of human suffering through the very fact of having taken this suffering upon his very self. During his public activity, he experienced not only fatigue, homelessness, misunderstanding even on the part of those closest to him, but, more than anything, he became progressively more and more isolated and encircled by hostility and preparations for putting him to death.”* John Paul II “*Salvifici Doloris*”

*“Jesus lost all his glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so we could get access. He was bound, nailed, so that we could be free. He was cast out so we could approach. And Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you: that is being cast away from God. He took that so that now all suffering that comes into your life will only make you great. A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. And the suffering of a person in Christ only turns you into somebody gorgeous.”* Tim Keller “Walking with God through Pain and Suffering”

*“Before Jesus leads His disciples into suffering, humiliation, disgrace, and disdain, He summons them and shows Himself to them as the Lord in God's glory. Before the disciples must descend with Jesus into the abyss of human guilt, malice, and hatred, Jesus leads them to a high mountain from which they are to receive help. Before Jesus' face is beaten and spat upon, before his cloak is torn and splattered with blood, the disciples are to see Him in his divine glory. His face shines like the face of God and light is the garment he wears.”* Dietrich Bonhoeffer “Meditations on the Cross”

*\*\*With someone else, discuss their meaning for you and the extent to which they resonate with how you think about suffering and pain.*

## **How did Jesus Suffer?**

In His life and particularly in His Passion, Jesus faced a great deal of suffering, through: Physical Pain, Emotional Trauma and Spiritual Abandonment.

***Read the following passages concerning the Suffering of Jesus:***

John 11:32-44 Lazarus and Jesus wept

Mark 14:32-42 Disciples fall asleep

Mark 14:43-50 Betrayal and Disciples flee

Mark 15:16-20 Mocking and stripping

Mark 15:25-37 Crucifixion

*\*\* Discuss the ways that Jesus suffered and how that may relate to the way that you have suffered and seen others suffer.*

In Mark's gospel (10:45), Jesus says "*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*". Jesus knew what this mission, ending on the cross, was all about, and He says it's fundamentally about laying down His life as a '*ransom for many*'. He is paying a costly price to redeem those who believe in salvation through Him. In reading these passages from Mark did it strike you as quite extraordinary that Jesus would give his life for people like those depicted in the text? Jesus is deserted by his friends, slandered by the religious leaders, convicted unjustly by the government, mocked, laughed at, humiliated by all different kinds of people. Prior to his death, for the entire chapter, there isn't a single positive description of anyone in their actions towards Jesus.

The apostle Paul writes, "*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son*" (Romans 5:6-10).

**\*\* Discuss what you understand by:**

*Jesus' words: "a ransom for many" and*

*Paul's words: "died for the ungodly"*

## **Why did Jesus Suffer?**

To focus our thoughts on this question it is perhaps instructive to concentrate on one short passage, such as this one from First Peter.

Peter is writing a pastoral letter to offer hope and encouragement to Christians in Asia Minor, in the midst of their suffering. Suffering is its primary theme and the word suffer or suffering is used over twenty times, as well as other words such as "trials", "testings", "fiery ordeal", etc... It's thought to be written around 65AD during a period when there was much harassment of Christians, but much greater suffering was expected later.

### ***Read 1 Peter 2:18-25***

This passage starts with suffering as a way to gain God's approval then Christ as '*an example to follow*' then Christ as '*the unique redeemer*'. The letter as a whole tells us that:

- Jesus came to show us the reality of the Kingdom of God
- He spent his time with the suffering: poor, sick, outcasts
- He entered into our experience of suffering

**\*\* How do you feel about these approaches to suffering?**

**Questions to aid your discussion:**

- *How did Jesus respond to injustice?*
- *What reasons does Peter give for Christ bearing our sin?*
- *What relationship does this have to our suffering?*

## **What Does Jesus' Suffering Means for Us**

Without doubt Jesus suffered horribly in the events that we recall each year in Holy Week, but in that suffering God wasn't punishing him, didn't stop

loving his Son or abandon him. When we suffer, whether from serious illness or from some other tragedy, we might be tempted to think our suffering means that God doesn't love us, that God is punishing us, or that God has rejected us or abandoned us. The suffering of Jesus suggests that none of these things is true. It reveals that God the Father allowed his only begotten Son to suffer the worst of torments. Yet, as the Resurrection states loud and clear, God the Father did not reject or abandon Jesus.

The passion of Christ shows us that Jesus shares in our suffering. Jesus is Emmanuel. His is God-with-us. In the mystery of the Incarnation, God came to dwell among us. Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, is fully divine, but also fully human. He shares our human life and human experience and is like us in every way except sin (See Hebrews passages below). In Jesus, God enters into human experience in a new way and so is able *“to sympathize with our weaknesses”* (Heb. 4:15).

It can also be argued that in the First Letter of Peter, by saying, *“Rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly”* (1 Pet. 4:13) that Peter is suggesting that our suffering can be united with the suffering of Christ. That we are invited to share in Jesus' suffering and to find in that sharing a cause for joy and a source of meaning.

***Read Hebrews 2:10-18 and Hebrews 4:14-16***

**\*\* Discuss the following statements about the meaning of Jesus' suffering, what they mean to you and the extent to which they are part of your understanding of the Suffering of Jesus:**

- Jesus entered into our suffering and took it upon himself
- Through Jesus, God helps us to understand our suffering
- Jesus transformed suffering and redeemed it
- Jesus life, passion, Death and Resurrection gives meaning and purpose to suffering