

## Twenty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (A) – Suffering

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If you were to ask my mother to describe the last 3-4 years of her life, I am certain that she will use the words pain and suffering. During the past 4 years she has had both knees partially replaced and recently suffered a ruptured Achilles tendon. She is in overall good spirits but in conversations with her, she will ask, why? Why so much suffering, or when will it go away? My mother's sufferings are mainly physical, she feels physical pain. Sometimes our sufferings are physical, or the physical pain of a loved one, other times **emotional pain/suffering, feeling lonely, depressed, anxious, suffering abandonment, broken relationships, a sense of not being good enough, struggling to identify with others, to fit in**, these are all situations that can cause pain/suffering. Yet we can also suffer **spiritual pain**, we might feel **abandoned by God, we might wonder if he exists, we might question our role in salvation, our purpose, simply we might not like where we are spiritually** and might feel that we should be in a different spiritual place. Each one of these aspects of suffering can act independently (physical, emotional, spiritual) but they can also intermingle and affect each other. You can feel physical pain, which can lead you to feel isolated, alone, abandoned leading you to question your faith, your God, your purpose. **Suffering is such a problem for us that many atheists** and agnostics say that they can't believe in God because of suffering. They ask... How can a good God, allow so much suffering and even of the innocent?

As a church we can go into theological reasons as to why people suffer. We can say that from the beginning it was not the plan. We can say that God can **allow** suffering to **allow** for a greater good, we can say that suffering is redemptive. This might all be true, but if at a moment of pain and suffering I tell my mother to offer up her suffering as they are redemptive, she will turn to me and say... "easy for you to say... you are not the one going through it" and she would be right. So, **what do we do with all this suffering?**

The prophet Jeremiah is sometimes called the "weeping prophet" it seems like he is always crying, so much so that one of the books assigned to him is called laments. As a prophet he had a real tough task of denouncing idolatry and the hardness of Israel's heart, yet no one listened, in the contrary they made fun of him, persecuted him, and wanted to kill him. I believe that he suffered greatly, physically, emotionally, and even spiritually, **listen to his cry; "You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped... All day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.... the word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day."** The prophet was under great emotional duress, he was undergoing great interior battle, great suffering. He wanted to stop being a prophet, he basically said God you are dead to me, internally he said what St. Teresa of Avila said, "If this is how You treat Your friends, then it is no wonder You have so few of them", he wanted to **ghost God**, he wanted to **unfriend him, unfollow**, yet he couldn't. There was something inside of him that was burning, he couldn't hold it, although he was suffering much, he couldn't abandon his path.

In the gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to suffer greatly, to the point of death but will be raised on the third day. Peter rebuked Jesus for such a prophecy, **why?** because no one wants to see a loved one suffering, we were not made for suffering, we don't like it, we might deal with it and make the best of it, but deep inside we know that we don't want it. Jesus himself cried out to the Father if it is possible for this cup to pass... but let your will be done. Jesus became one of us to show us the way, yet he suffered greatly. He accepted the mission because he loves you, because he doesn't want you to go through any suffering on your own. He was raised on the third day and the eucharist is the byproduct of his mission, he gives himself completely in the eucharist so that we can receive him and allow him to join us in our suffering, to allow him to be with us and to sooth our wounds.

When we receive the eucharist we are allowing God to transform us from the inside out, inch by inch, cell by cell. The Eucharist as a sacrament gives us the grace, the power, the fuel to continue, to take one more step, to withstand one more moment. Your suffering, emotional, spiritual, or physical might not go away but the eucharist will give you the grace to know that you are not alone, that he suffered for you so that **eventually** you will not have to. **Jeremiah** was trying to stop prophesying, he didn't want to suffer embarrassment, abuse, insults, even physical pain... but he couldn't stop, there was a fire inside of him that kept burning... Equally we will undergo many suffering, physical, emotional or spiritual but the eucharist can help us by sustain us, by giving us the strength, the courage and the certitude that we will not be alone in the journey. **Communion** means a common union, we stand together in a common cry of pain, suffering, joy, and thankfulness, we join our sufferings with those of Christ and hence build that common union with Christ. We become one with each other and with Christ.

**Thank you for sharing this communion with me... by doing it you are sharing in my suffering and uniting it to our Lord's suffering... I trust that this communion will help quench our thirst and sooth our sufferings.**

**Let us cry out as the psalmist said:** O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water. Thus, have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory... You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**