

XXXIV. The Redemptive Meaning of Suffering

Objectives

- Compare the modern view of suffering versus the Christian view.
- Explain the nature of evil, and the subjective and objective experience of evil.
- How does Jesus challenge society's view of suffering?
- Explain by using Christ's suffering, how love can transform suffering.
- Explain how it is possible to be grateful for suffering.

Notes

I. Modern View of Suffering

- First principle of modern morality, "pleasure is good, pain is bad."
- Pleasure is seen as the ultimate good to be obtained
- Pain is seen as the ultimate evil to be avoided.
- E.g. the euthanasia movement

II. The Christian View of Suffering

- Every person has dignity, even (and especially) those who suffer
- Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "It is not a pity that there is so much suffering in the world, the pity is that so much suffering is wasted."
- From a Christian perspective, suffering has an entirely new meaning

III. The World of Human Suffering

- Human suffering is more than physical pain we share with animals
- There often a physical element to suffering, because we are a body/soul composite
- However, suffering is more accurately described as pain of the soul, so there is a spiritual dimension to it.

IV. The Nature of Evil

- Suffering occurs when we experience any kind of evil
- Everything in creation is good, because God has created it.
- Evil is not a positive reality, rather it is the lack of something that should be there.
- Evil is a distortion or a limitation.
- E.g. The devil is good insofar as he has existence, but evil because he has cut himself off from the love of God.

V. The Nature of Evil

- Evil must reside in something good.
- The reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always in some way refers to a good.
- "We could say that man suffers because of a good in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself. He particularly suffers when he ought, in the normal order of things, to have a share in this good and does not have it." (JPII SD)

VI. Two Aspects to Experience of Evil

- The objective dimension is that there is some thing present to the soul causing evil in that soul.
- E.g. If one has been abuse, a person who has done it.
- The subjective dimension is how the person perceives and experiences the evil that is causing their suffering.

- E.g. Two people can have the same thing happen to them, but there are different effects.

VII. The Quest for Meaning

- First question the sufferer asks, “Why is this happening to me?”
- Prosperity is seen as a sign of moral goodness
- We believe the just man will prosper while the wicked man will be punished
- Suffering is seen as a sign of God’s disfavor with us.

VIII. Jesus Challenges this view

- As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. (John 9:1-3)

IX. Suffering Has Come into the World through Sin.

- Not physical pain, but the human experience of suffering.
- We live in a fallen world, deeply affected by sin
- All who are affected by sin now have an experience of suffering.

X. Sometimes We Cause Our Own Sufferings

- Sin is its own punishment
- The lack that we cause in our souls is experienced as suffering
- Even if we repent, we still have to bear with the consequences of our actions.
- Healing must take place after even after forgiveness
- In these cases the suffering is medicinal
- It serves to rebuild the goodness of the subject, who can recognize the Divine Mercy in this call to repentance
- The purpose of penance is to overcome evil
- It strengthens our goodness in ourselves and in our relationships with others (especially God)

XI. Sometimes We Suffer at the Hands of Others

- We often suffer because of the sins of others
- No sin is a private sin, it always affects others

XII. Love Gives Meaning to Others

- Love is the richest source of the meaning of suffering
- We realize that our own explanations are lacking
- Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the “why” of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

XIII. To Understand Suffering, We Must Have Some Experience of Love

- If we do not have some understanding of love, especially the love that Christ has for us, we will never even begin to understand suffering.
- The meaning of suffering given to man by God is found in the Cross of Jesus Christ.
- Only the one who can heal us of our sinfulness can give meaning to our suffering.

XIV. Jesus Christ: Suffering Conquered by Love

- Sin is at the root of all suffering, but Christ is able to use it to bring about redemption.
- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16

- There is a connection between loving and giving.
- Love in its fullest meaning is a gift, and the greatest gift that one can give is oneself

XV. Through Gift of Love, the Son Strikes at the Root of Sin

- The Father draws the world to himself through suffering
- It is by means of suffering, that Christ conquers suffering.
- Christ liberates us from the ultimate suffering, which is everlasting damnation.
- He throws open the gates of mercy and love so we may have life to the full

XVI. Christ's Sacrifice is Voluntary

- He does not have to do it, but he does it out of love
- He is the innocent one who suffers for the guilty
- In Christ, suffering is united to love
- Where there was emptiness before, it is now filled with the infinite love of the Savior.
- "Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ, and at the same time it has entered into a completely new dimension and a new order: it has been linked to love, to that love of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus, to that love which creates good, drawing it out by means of suffering, just as the supreme good of the Redemption of the world was drawn from the Cross of Christ, and from that Cross constantly takes its beginning." (JPII SD)

XVII. Jesus Unites Our Suffering to His Own

- Jesus experiences the depth of our sufferings in his own soul.
- If he did not do this, then there are some for whom Christ did not die.

XVIII. Sharers in the Suffering of Christ

- If Christ died for my sins does that mean that I don't have to?
- No
- Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, for I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church" (Col 1:24)

XIX. Christ Transforms Our Sufferings

- He gives meaning and value to our sufferings
- If we have been baptized into his resurrection, we have also been baptized into his suffering and death.
- Christ dwells in us meaning he is present in us where we suffer most, in our hearts.
- "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal 2:20)

XX. We Present Our Bodies as a Living Sacrifice

- We do not suffer for its own sake, but have as their end redemption.
- Through our willingness to suffer, we show our love for Christ and our neighbor.
- We complete the suffering of Christ, and in it we complete the redemptive work of Christ.

XXI. Suffering as a Privilege

- Suffering is in reality a privilege,
- "This comes from God, for you have been granted the privilege for Christ's sake not only of believing in him but of suffering for him as well." (Phil 1:29)

XXII. Gratitude for suffering.

- The great saints were grateful for their sufferings
- They saw that in their sufferings their greatest prayer

- Also saw that sufferings were enabling them to be more like Jesus.
- We must attach our suffering to some aspect of the life of Jesus or Mary.

What does Jesus own suffering tell us about our suffering?

How was the suffering of Jesus an act of love for the Father and for us?

Why do people who suffer often think that God hates them?

How can an 'attitude of gratitude' toward suffering help transform the suffering in our lives?

Use an example of suffering from your own life and show how God may be using it to help you grow in the spiritual life.
