

Ad Veritatem

Volume 13 Issue 4

St. Thomas More Society of Orange County

APRIL 2008

*“Give me thy grace to amend my life,
and to have an eye to mine end without
grudge of death, which to them that die
in thee, good Lord, is the gate of a
wealthy life.”*

Written by More after he was condemned
to death while in the Tower of London

APRIL MEETING:

WEDNESDAY APRIL 16, 2008 NOON

SPEAKER: CHARLES S. LIMANDRI, ESQ.

**TOPIC: “THE IMPACT OF SAME SEX MARRIAGES
ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM”**

DETAILS ON PAGE 3



“Ad Veritatem” is Latin for “Toward the truth.”



WHO WE ARE

In 1966, the movie *A Man For All Seasons* inspired the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to recognize this film as the Picture of the Year. This was one of the few occasions in the history of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences where the life of a religious figure won the hearts of the motion picture industry's elite. The central figure portrayed in *Man For All Seasons* was, of course, St. Thomas More, the great lawyer, statesman, apologist, husband, father and faithful Catholic. In 2000, St. Thomas was honored as the Lawyer of the Millennium by a secular panel of historians for the British Commonwealth. Shortly thereafter, John Paul II declared St. Thomas as the Patron Saint of Statesmen.

Inspired by a homily given by Bishop Norman McFarland at the 1995 Red Mass of Orange County, five "fearless" members of the Orange County bar met shortly thereafter at the law offices of Rutan and Tucker in Costa Mesa. These lawyers all shared the realization that the legal practice takes a severe toll on the personal and spiritual lives of those involved in it and that many in the legal profession had become too focused on the material life with the natural consequence being the de-emphasis on their spiritual life. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formation of a new organization for lawyers and judges in the County of Orange with its mission being to publicly support and encourage the spiritual development of its members in their Catholic faith. The group chose as its patron St. Thomas More, the greatest lawyer of his time, who was a dedicated husband and father with a deep and profound commitment to his Catholic faith, his profession and his fellow man. Thus the St. Thomas More Society of Orange County was born.

Attendance at the monthly meetings in the early years was sporadic. Our spiritual director, Fr Hugh Barbour, wisely advised us not to worry about numbers because it was more important "to be than to do or say." He encouraged the virtues of patience and perseverance. His sage advice, together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and St. Thomas More, has led us to our current level of a fourteen member Board of Directors of lawyers and judges and a mailing list for the monthly newsletter of over 970.

The goal of the Society is to inspire and lift up the minds and hearts of the legal community of Orange County to follow the example of St. Thomas More by integrating God in every aspect of their professional and personal lives. The Society seeks to accomplish this goal through inspirational speakers at monthly meetings, this newsletter, the Red Mass, a website, an annual spiritual retreat and other events. The St. Thomas More Society also seeks to provide a haven where those who are committed to their Catholic faith as well as those who are seeking to learn more about the Church, can find fellowship and encouragement in the face of overwhelming media and cultural forces working against that pursuit.

St. Thomas More, please pray for us. ☩

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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St. Michael's Abbey

AD VERITATEM EDITOR
ANNE LANPHAR

APRIL
MEETING

CHARLES LIMANDRI

**“THE IMPACT OF SAME SEX MARRIAGES
ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM”**



WHEN:
NOON
Wed. April 16th

WHERE:
First American
Trust Bldg.
5 First American
Way, Santa Ana

FOR DIRECTIONS
(714) 250-3000

COST:
Lunch: \$15

Attorney Charles S. LiMandri is the lead attorney in the Mt Soledad lawsuit defending the presence of a cross at the federal cemetery in San Diego. He is currently a leader in the National Organization for Marriage which is promoting a ballot measure in California to protect marriage.

In addition to his own active litigation practice, Charles is also the West Coast Director of the Thomas More Law Center (www.thomasmore.org) which is a non profit public interest law firm dedicated to defense and promotion of religious freedom of Christians, time-honored family values and the sanctity of human life. Charles graduated from Georgetown University Law Center in 1983. He was a summa cum laude graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of San Diego in 1977. He also received a Diploma in International Law & Relations in 1980. Charles is AV rated by his peers and is a member of the Million Dollar Advocates Circle, American Board of Trial Advocacy, Bar Register of Preeminent Lawyers, and has received numerous awards and recognitions. He served as the President of the St Thomas More Society of San Diego and is currently the President of the San Diego chapter of Legagus. †

STM MONTHLY MTGS:
3RD WEDNESDAY OF MONTH:

MAY 21
JUNE 18
JULY 16
AUGUST 20
SEPTEMBER 17 †

RESERVE THE DATE!
RED MASS

MONDAY OCTOBER 6, 2008
HOLY FAMILY CATHEDRAL
6:00 PM MASS
RECEPTION & DINNER FOLLOWING†

CALENDAR
REMINDERS



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THE BENEFIT OF PENANCE

FR. HUGH BARBOUR, O. PRAEM, PH.D.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAPLAIN



ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
IN THE DESERT

*Domenico
Ghirlandaio
(1486-90)*

QUESTION: *I've read some amazing things about the penances performed by the saints. Sometimes they go beyond what seems reasonable; not just fasting or keeping silence, but flogging themselves, wearing hairshirts, spiked belts, and so on. How can such things be justified, especially in the light of St. Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 6:19 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?*

ANSWER: Further on in the same epistle St. Paul says, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Our Lord Himself fasted and kept vigils, even though He was sinless. His penances merited for us the grace to do penance for our sins, as He reminds: "Those whom I love, I rebuke and chastise. Be zealous, therefore, and do penance" (Rev. 3:19). The saints longed for the coming of the kingdom, and by their sometimes severe penances, they tried to hasten its appearance in themselves and in others. The trouble is not that some saints may have exaggerated this penitential spirit, but that we, with all our sins, do so little penance. We may not have to perform the hair-raising feats of some of the saints, but all of us can show that we share in a Christ-like love by chastising and mastering our bodies through penances compatible with our duties and station in life. Christian penance is not an expression of a belief that the body or its pleasures are evil. Rather penance is a kind of "house cleaning" of the temple of the Holy Spirit. Sin, even when it has been forgiven, still has an effect on the soul, leaving a scar or residue, like the mess left behind after the storm is over and the sky has cleared. Theologians speak of a residue left by sins called "temporal punishment," the debt owed in justice to God who has been merciful in forgiving our sins and remitting (eliminating) the eternal punishment they deserve. Nothing we could do could repair for the debt of eternal punishment, so we can't do penance for that. Only Christ could do that. But being a wise Father, God wants His children to do what they can, and since we can perform penances for the remission of temporal punishment, He requires this of us. God is just as well as merciful. There is also the so-called "kindling" in our souls, left by past sins, that can easily ignite the passions and result in more sins. The Latin term for this used by theologians is the *fomes peccati* (think of the verb "to foment" something, and you'll have a feel for the force of the phrase). By practicing virtue, "acts that go against our sinful inclinations," we can weaken sin's hold on us. If we're lazy, we can sleep a little less; if gluttonous, we can fast; if lustful, we can abstain for a time, with the consent of one's spouse. These actions are all types of fasting. It is precisely because our bodies are meant for God's service that we do penance, to make up for our abuse of the body which is really meant for His use and His dwelling. In doing penance we will also remind ourselves of the fact which Our Lord most often related to penance: We are not made for this world, but for the kingdom of heaven, as He said, "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt.4:17).

After telling us that we are the temples of God in whom the Holy Spirit dwells in 1 Corinthians 6:19, St. Paul says, "You are not your own. For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body." Performing acts of penance reminds us that we are not our own property, but God's, members of Christ's Body and citizens of the kingdom. ✠

SUFFERING IN UNION WITH CHRIST

FR. JOSEPH NGUYEN

Gary Cooper was a Hollywood superstar. He won two Oscars during his career: one for the title role in Sergeant York; the other for the high-drama role for the town sheriff in High Noon.

Many of Gary Cooper's movies are still big-ticket items on cable and DirecTV.

Gary's life, like the lives of so many people including myself, seems to have fallen into two stages.

The first stage was pretty much one of living exclusively for this life. His goal was to be successful and to enjoy the fruits of success.

The second stage began with an encounter with Jesus. With that encounter came a new vision of life. Gary saw it as the prelude to and preparation for a more wonderful life to come.

In spite of his celebrity status, Gary Cooper retained a genuine simplicity and humility throughout the first stage of his life. It was this simplicity and humility that paved the way for the second and most important stage.

Upon his death, a foreign newspaper said of him: "He had the soul of a boy and was the incarnation of the honorable American."

The pastor of Good Shepherd Church in Beverly Hills knew Gary well. After Gary's death from cancer, the pastor wrote: "As a priest, I have prepared many people for death. But I have never met a person more resigned and disposed for death than Gary. Like Christ, he remained meek and humble of heart to the end."

The pastor cited this example to illustrate his point:

A few months before Gary died, the two of them were conversing in a softly lit room in Gary's house. At one point, Gary said: "As you know, Father, I became Catholic only a few years back. Why is it that now, as a Catholic, I feel more sinful?"

The pastor responded by saying, "Gary, have you got a flashlight?" Gary went off and got one. Taking the flashlight, the pastor said, "Gary, you're wearing what looks like a flawless sweater; but when I shine the flashlight on it—like this—we both see a tiny stain and some loose threads on it. Before your conversion, you were in the dark. You never reflected much on your relationship with God. Since your conversion, you reflect on it a lot. This is why you are now more aware of your shortcomings."

Gary said, "Now, that makes sense. That really makes sense."

The pastor's explanation fits beautifully with Paul's words to the Ephesians in today's second reading. He writes: "You yourselves used to be in the darkness, but since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light. So you must live like people who belong to the light, for it is the light that brings a rich harvest... Try to learn what pleases the Lord."

Sometime later, Gary began experiencing intense pain from his cancer. The pastor gave him a small steel crucifix, saying, "Gary, hang on to this light. When



By offering their suffering in union with the suffering of Jesus on the cross, they transformed it into a vehicle for helping others, and a vehicle for growing in their relationship with Jesus.

(Continued from page 5) ***Suffering in Union with Christ***

the pain gets really bad, squeeze it and remind yourself to unite your pain with the pain of Jesus for the salvation of souls.”

After Gary died, his pastor saw an article by a popular author. He described a visit in the final days of Gary's life. The author commented that during their visit together, Gary kept squeezing a small crucifix. The pastor said later: “The author of that article had no idea of the significance of the crucifix, but Gary did, and so did I.” The story of Gary Cooper dovetails with today's Gospel.

The story of the man born blind tells how he went through a faith journey not unlike Gary's own faith journey. It, too, involved two stages.

During the first stage, the blind man did not know Jesus. Understandably, during that stage he was not too concerned about any other life, except this one.

The second stage of the man's life began with his encounter with Jesus. We might compare the blind man's washing in the waters of Siloam to Gary's washing in the waters of baptism. Both washings resulted in a totally new vision for both the blind man and for Gary.

Both washings resulted in a new vision of Jesus.....and both washings resulted in a new vision of life.

Significantly, both washings also resulted in a period of suffering for both... and in both cases, the suffering was instrumental drawing both into a closer relationship with Jesus.

It is right here where the stories of the blind man and Gary Cooper touch our lives. In both stories, the sufferings of each began as a cross, but ended up a blessing.

By offering their suffering in union with the suffering of Jesus on the cross, they transformed it into a vehicle for helping others, and a vehicle for growing in their relationship with Jesus.

Both stories remind us that we, too, can turn our sufferings into blessings by following their examples. This is Good News in today's readings. This is Good News we now return to the altar to celebrate in the Eucharist.

This is the good news Jesus wants us to carry forth from this Church today and, by our example, share with all whose lives touch us. †

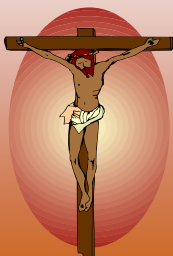


**CHRIST ON THE
CROSS WITH THE
TWO MARYS &
ST JOHN**

El Greco
(1588)

PRAYER

PETITIONS



***Heavenly Father, I offer you this day
all that I shall think, do or say,
uniting it with what was done
by Jesus Christ, your only Son. Amen***

***If you have a special need for
prayer, please let us know so by
emailing your request to
alanphar@firstam.com***

- ◆ Bill Allard (special intention)
- ◆ Carol Flynn (illness)
- ◆ Brandon Jackson (Iraq)
- ◆ Carli Whittemore
- ◆ Mike Quigley (illness)
- ◆ Jean Howard
- ◆ Ryan McEachon (special intention)
- ◆ Heather Flynn USAFA (special intention)
- ◆ John Flynn IV USNA (special intention)
- ◆ Kathy Todd (cancer)
- ◆ Ellie Shonafelt & Her Children
- ◆ David Macdonald (illness)
- ◆ Eric & Marie Bessem
- ◆ Julia Nelson (serious illness)
- ◆ Sean Nelson (illness)
- ◆ Scott Smith (illness)
- ◆ Ron Gable (special intention)
- ◆ Anne Lanphar (special intention) †

THE PAIN OF GRACE*

JONI SEITH

. “What’s a nice Jewish girl doing in a place like this?” I often think, when I have a quiet moment between customers. It must be God’s sense of humor. Me, a Jewish girl running a Catholic T-shirt company. “How did this happen?” I’m often asked. My answer: “Grace — and God’s overwhelming gift of faith, love, and mercy!” My name is Joni, pronounced “Johnny.” This greeting usually evokes the same response: “How did you get a name like that? Johnny is a boy’s name.” It is with the reply that my story begins . .

I was born the younger of two daughters to Elaine and Stanley Felser, a Jewish couple from Pittsburgh. In the Jewish tradition, children are named for deceased members of the family to give them honor and to guarantee the memory of the dearly departed. I was named after my fraternal grandfather, who passed away when my father was fifteen.

Our family’s Jewishness was more cultural than religious. We believed in God. We were taught that God was our Creator, and that He gave us rules to live by. Other than that, I really didn’t think much more about Him.

I did, however, enjoy the many wonderful traditions that our Jewish ancestors handed down. I especially appreciated the foods and holiday festivities of Purim, Chanukah, Rosh Hashanah, and Passover. There was nothing like the feast after the fast of Yom Kippur.

My maternal grandparents, however, abandoned their Jewish faith for the teachings of Christian Science. They came to live with us after my grandmother became seriously ill with heart disease, and they lived with us for most of my life as a child.

I remember going with Grandpa to his Christian Science meetings and the Sunday school there. Something didn’t seem right. Grandpa was always grumpy. He couldn’t deal with Grandma’s numerous doctor appointments, her medications, or her frequent ambulance trips to the hospital in the middle of the night.

He was always fighting with her about something he called “faith.” Grandpa felt that if Grandma had enough “faith,” she wouldn’t be sick. He was angry because of her lack of “faith” and the burden she had become to him.

Why couldn’t he see what peace and joy she brought to the rest of us? Why couldn’t he enjoy the many hours she would spend with my sister and me, listening to the events of our day? Why couldn’t he find pleasure in just being with us, as Grandma did? It was so peaceful to sit with Grandma, as she would make her beaded flowers and hum her favorite tunes. Why couldn’t he love her as she loved us?

My sister and I decided that we didn’t want to go to the Christian Science meetings any longer. If we were Jewish, then we should go to the Jewish temple and learn about Judaism. Learning the stories of Noah, King David, and Esther were the more memorable lessons for me.

Learning Hebrew was not! Regrettably, all those new letters and words made me anxious. I dreaded our weekly Sabbath school lessons. I remember thinking, “If this is what being Jewish is about, I’m going to make an awful Jew.”

The Sabbath school lessons came to an end, and life went on as normal for awhile. “The family across the street were better Jews than we were anyway,” I thought. “We can go to their Bar Mitzvahs and Passover Seders to fulfill our Jewish obligations.” Obviously, I was clueless about what being Jewish was about. But life seemed good and I



It was a great lesson to learn. Yet I’d actually begun to learn it, not through my own trials, but through my grandmother’s example. Somehow she had come to understand the redemptive power of suffering.

*From Envoy Magazine

The Pain of Grace (Continued on page 8)

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thought, “Who needs religion or God anyway?”

I did the worldly life for the next few years. I attended a few youth group meetings at the temple. I partied. I went to college and got my degree so that I could teach art. I partied. I learned that my boyfriend was involved with the occult. We broke up. I partied. I got an ulcer. Life went on. And I partied!

Then the nightmares started. For an entire year it was the same nightmare: chanting, evil nuns and monks burying me alive. The paralyzing terror!

I became depressed and confused. Life wasn't fun anymore. I felt so alone. I couldn't sleep, because sleep made things worse. The chanting, the nuns, the monks, sheer evil terror!

I couldn't escape the nightmares. I was disenchanted with life. I couldn't escape into sleep, and I was too afraid to die.

But Grandma wasn't afraid to die. She said she'd had enough of the pain. By then, Grandma had abandoned her involvement with the Christian Science Church. I can't recall her discussing her relationship with God with us, but I feel certain that she had developed such a relationship. I don't know for sure what shape her faith in God finally took in her last days, but I know that she wanted to go to God. I remember the events as if they happened yesterday . . .

It happened the day I came home from my sixth-grade field trip. Mom was shopping, and my sister wasn't home from school yet. Dad was sleeping. (He worked the night shift and slept during the day.)

Grandma was in bed. She'd just been released from her latest hospital stay the day before and was still too sick and weak to be out of bed. Grandpa hadn't been home in a long time. He'd moved to Florida.

I went to the back bedroom to see Grandma and tell her I was home from school. Grandma looked really bad. “I need to go back to the hospital now,” she said. I called 911, wrote a note to Mom, left it on the kitchen table, and accompanied Grandma on her final trip in the ambulance to the hospital.

When she was settled into her bed in the intensive care unit, I kissed her and told her that I loved her. I turned to leave. “I'm ready, Joni. I have lived long enough and I am ready to go.” It wasn't what Grandma said, but how she said it that I remember most. She spoke her final words with such peace, with a joyful anticipation.

She carried her cross in peace and with confidence, praying, I believe, that we would one day come to know God and love Him. Grandma died because her heart wore out. It was worn out because it endlessly loved a man who didn't know true love and true faith. It was worn out because she continually loved us, her family.

I had forgotten about Grandma's last moments for a long time. But now, this evening, I could hear Grandma's heart beating loud and clear in my own. I was terrified of another nightmare! I knew I'd go out of my mind if I had to endure one more.

Who was this God from whom my Grandmother drew such peace in her final moments? Would He share this peace with me? I heard that He was there for us, but I didn't know Him.

I sat on the edge of the bed and cried out, “God, if you're there and you want me, give me a peaceful night's sleep. Stop these nightmares and I'm yours!” I lay down and went to sleep. The next morning, I sat up and returned to the edge of my bed. “Okay God, now what? I'm yours!” I was surely going to have to keep my end of the bargain. For the first time in a year, I'd had a peaceful night's sleep and I was no longer afraid.

Immediately good, faithful, Christ-filled people came into my life. I knew that I had to be a Christian, because I didn't have a problem believing that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, I'd asked a rabbi years earlier at one of the synagogue teen gatherings: “Why didn't we accept Jesus as the Messiah? It seems to me that he fulfilled what was written in our Bible” (or at least the little I knew from the Scriptures). I was told not to come back. It was obvious that I made a lousy Jew.

For the next few months, I religion-shopped. I went to churches of different denominations and even went back to temple to make sure I wasn't making a big mistake. “What if the rabbi was right? I could be in a lot of trouble,” I thought. As I visited different churches and the synagogue, I realized that something was missing, but I



The Pain of Grace (Continued on page 9)

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didn't know what.

Finally I went into a Catholic church to see what it had to offer. I arrived for their celebration and immediately felt comfortable. Many of the gestures were reminiscent of the worship in the temple. I liked the reverence, the Old Testament reading, and the psalms. All seemed kosher. They even celebrated what looked a lot like the Passover meal.

Then something happened that changed my life forever. Bells rang and the celebrant took in his hands a white circle. As he held this mysterious disk high for all to see, my eyes were opened. I saw reality for the first time. "My Lord and my God!" was proclaimed through my entire being, and I wept. I was home. I immediately went to my parents and told them that I was going to be Catholic. They had seen it coming, but figured that this whim would pass.

I decided to contact the mother of my childhood friend Terri, who was Catholic. I still remembered how Terri and I had played board games at her house when we were young. The picture of Jesus that had hung on the wall in the room where we'd played had captivated me. In the picture, Jesus was holding something. I couldn't figure out what it was.

After months of wonderment, I'd finally concluded that I'd figured out what it was Jesus was holding. So I'd asked Terri, "Why is Jesus holding a cupcake?" Needless to say, this question had provided a wonderful opportunity for Terri and her mother to talk with me about Jesus and His Sacred Heart. Now I would need to know more, a lot more! So I called Terri's mom, who still lived around the corner from my family's house.

"Barb, this is Joni. I want to be Catholic, and I don't know how."

Soon I entered RCIA with Barb as my sponsor. I read everything I could get my hands on about the Catholic faith. God gave me the opportunity to read and study thoroughly.

For the next year, I had plenty of time to learn, because I underwent two surgeries on my knees. Complications arose, and I got blood clots in both legs and broke my leg while sitting up in bed. I used this time in bed to absorb as much as I could before my baptism and First Communion at the Easter vigil. I didn't realize then that Jesus was trying to teach me what I had asked for: to know Him and to love Him.

I remember driving by a Catholic church one evening and seeing the illuminated crucifix through the window of the church. "True love and the pain of suffering," I thought. "I don't understand, but I know that they go hand in hand."

I knew in my heart that this would be a lesson Jesus would teach me. I didn't know how. But I knew that this was a lesson I would have to learn if I was truly to love. The next ten years were filled with the joys and sorrows familiar to many. I married the man God had chosen as my spouse. The "specialists" told us that I probably wouldn't be able to conceive a child because of endometriosis. But through the grace of God, I conceived and gave birth to my four beautiful blessings.

Then the endometriosis became so debilitating that I had to have a complete hysterectomy at the age of thirty-two. At that time the doctors discovered that my bone density was that of an eighty-year-old. From that point on, my body seemed to fall apart.

In October of 1994, I knew something was coming, and I was frightened. Things started to hurt in my body. One day I went to Mass, and after Communion, I prayed that God would heal me. With all my being I wanted to be well and not have to go through what I felt was coming. I prayed with the faith that my grandfather wanted Grandma to have. "O God, if you make me healthy, what good I could do for you!" I prayed with all my heart.

"Joni, the weaker you are, the more I can work through you," was God's reply. I was angry! How could this be? I was ready for His healing and totally open to it. And this was the answer He gave me. I didn't like it, and more importantly, I didn't know what it meant.

When I arrived home, my husband, Bob, could tell that I was upset. I told him how I'd prayed harder than I'd ever prayed before for God to make me a healthy person. I told him what I felt in my heart was God's answer and that I

I didn't understand it. Bob immediately grabbed his Bible and showed me that St. Paul had written something similar in his second letter to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 12:8-10). He said that it was biblically sound, and the fact that I wasn't expecting this probably meant that it was from God and not my own thoughts. I didn't like

The Pain of Grace (Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9) *The Pain of Grace*

God's answer and I didn't like Bob's. I would just ignore it and it would go away.

The pain got worse. I didn't sleep. I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and told that I should do aerobic exercise to relieve the pain. My doctor also said that weight lifting would probably help my bone density problem. So I joined a gym and made up my mind to get healthy.

Five months later, however, I found myself unable even to get off the couch. I couldn't walk, sit, or move without excruciating pain. I lost feeling in parts of my body. At times, my limbs turned blue, and my body would swell all over.

I went from doctor to doctor. Tests would show where the problems were, but not why. The doctors didn't know how to relieve my pain or how to help me. I was scared! I was hurting. I couldn't move. I couldn't care for my children or my husband. I didn't understand. So I prayed.

After nine months the doctors finally diagnosed me with a rare genetic connective tissue disease called Ehlers Danlos. It was also likely that my collagen wasn't being made correctly. The doctors concluded that the muscle and connective tissues attached to the base of my spine had ripped away from the bones in my lower back.

My bones were weak; my whole structure was now unstable. I couldn't move. The pain medication was helpful, but when I used it, I couldn't think straight. All I could do was pray. And God answered. While lying on the couch, I felt despair. But God allowed me to see despair through the eyes of a person with faith. I learned in an instant what faith was, and the difference faith in God made in a person's life.

Faith had made the difference in my grandparents. It made my grandfather nasty, because his faith relied on himself. My grandmother's faith gave her peace because she relied on God. It was now time for me to rely on God too. It was obvious that I couldn't rely on the doctors, my loving family, or myself.

Grace came. The grace to believe in Him who loved me more than anyone else loved me. The grace to accept that my illnesses would be around until He who created me was ready to heal me. The grace to trust Him, who knew better than anyone, how He wanted to use me for His good. And He showered me with His peace.

With this new awareness came an acceptance of my deteriorating health. Although the illnesses wrought havoc with my body, they didn't steal my peace. The pain didn't subside, but now I was able to deal with it better. God taught me how to "offer it up." I had heard the expression, but now He wanted me to live it.

"O God! Please don't let this go to waste!" I cried out, with tears rolling down my cheeks, as I waited in the emergency room for another useless attempt to get relief from the pain. It was with that pathetic plea that I learned my favorite prayer. In the time to come I would pray this many times in the darkness of my sleepless nights: "I don't know how You turn this pain into graces, but I know that you do. Please don't let this go to waste."

"Lord, you'd better be working through me!" I cried out in my heart as my father helped me put on my shoes before taking me to yet another doctor's appointment. I couldn't do it myself. I couldn't put on my socks or shoes without help and I couldn't pray without help.

My parents, husband, and friends were always there to help, and so were my heavenly family and friends. I learned to love the saints. They had "been there, done that," and now they were helping me, their sister in faith. I received so many graces through their intercession, and God was calling me to share those graces by praying for others.

Our Lord was teaching me how to pray with my body. How to "offer up" my pain, my fear, my self. "Now," I prayed, "God, give me something to do, or I will go crazy lying here on the couch."

God planted the idea in my head that I could draw Catholic T-shirts from the couch. After all, how many times did my husband Bob say to me that we really need some strong Catholic T-shirts out there? Not just Christian, but Catholic.

Father's Day was coming. I could make Bob a Catholic T-shirt for his Father's Day gift. So I drew a picture



The Pain of Grace (Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10) *The Pain of Grace*

of the Blessed Mother with fabric crayons and ironed it on a shirt for him. Our friends came over to visit, saw the shirt and told me that if I made more, they would sell them in their Christian book and gift store. That night our T-shirt business, Biblically Correct, was born.

Soon the doctors fitted me for a back brace to hold me together. I went to physical therapy to break up the rock-hard muscle spasms throughout my body. I wore supports in my shoes to keep the ligaments in my feet from tearing. And I was getting epidural nerve blocks with cortisone to help relieve the pain.

I started a bone treatment I.V. program to improve my bone density. I used a wheelchair to get around. I was a new woman, and I was ready to get off the couch. I was finally able to go back and pray with our Tuesday night Rosary group at Sacred Heart Chapel.

One night while we were praying the Rosary, God said to me, “Joni, you know how you always say that you would rather have these illnesses instead of your children? That you would rather suffer your migraines than have your children suffer them?”

“Yes, Lord,” I said, concerned about what He was leading to. “Well, don’t you know that is what I did for My children? I suffered for their sins. I suffered their pain and punishment so that they would not have to suffer the pains of hell. I did this because I love them and because I love you.”

That night Jesus taught me what love is. That night Jesus invited me, as He invites all of us, to love as He does. “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).

That night Jesus taught me the meaning of His holy cross. He taught me the meaning of His Sacred Heart. That night Jesus taught me about true love.

Meanwhile, my health continued to decline. We had to stop the epidurals because they were destroying my connective tissue even more than the Ehlers Danlos was. The bone treatments weren’t helping my bone density, and they aggravated and intensified my migraine headaches. But I couldn’t stop the treatments because my bones would get even worse, I was told.

Even so, my bones were already worse. I now had the bone density of a ninety-year-old. My foot broke while I was walking out of church. I tore my rib cage from my sternum while I was sleeping and had to get a new brace to sleep in. Without this huge and cumbersome brace, I would continue to dislocate my ribs. I thought I had trusted God before. Now the time had come for me really to trust Him.

Our T-shirt business continued to grow, and now God gave me a children’s book of saints to write and illustrate. He wasn’t going to let me lose my mind as well as my body! The worse I felt, the more inspired I was to draw and write.

God gave me the gift of my artwork and our T-shirt business to keep me sane. He gave me the gift of praying with my body to make me holy and to make me humble. I became well aware that I can do all things only through Christ who strengthens me (see Phil. 4:13).

Through these challenges, God gave me an awareness of what so-called “mercy killings” were stealing away from the sick and elderly. The “culture of death” mentality was trying to steal us away from an intimate walk with Jesus Christ, from the loving sacrifice that He had waiting for those who suffer. This world wants to steal our peace, our joy, and the uniting of our sufferings with His. This world wants to steal our chance to love as Jesus loves.

But thanks be to God, Jesus kept the world from robbing me of that blessing. He taught me what it means to “offer it up.” All we need to do is to ask Him to pour out His grace on our brothers and sisters and to offer up our pain and illnesses, our disappointments as well as our joys, for the sake of others. God loves us so much that He wants us to share in the loving sacrifice of His cross, the instrument of His love and grace, His peace and life in us — the mystery of His Most Sacred Heart

It was a great lesson to learn. Yet I’d actually begun to learn it, not through my own trials, but through my grandmother’s example. Somehow she had come to understand the redemptive power of suffering. She hadn’t wasted her suffering with a bad attitude or a “Why me?” mentality. Instead, she had prayed through her illness. By offering up her suffering, I believe, Grandma had asked our Lord to shed graces on her little Jewish granddaughter, so that one day I might learn to live and love as Jesus does.

Visit Joni Seith’s website at <http://www.biblicallycorrect.com> †



SCRIPTURAL CORNER



CHRIST CARRYING
THE CROSS

El Greco

(1600-05)

*The Navarre Bible, a renowned edition of Sacred Scripture prepared by members of the Faculty of Theology of Navarre University, consisting of the New Vulgate, the Revised Standard Version and commentaries.

LUKE 9:23

And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Comment from the Navarre Bible:*

"Christ is saying this again, to us, whispering it in our ears: the cross *each day*. As St Jerome puts it: 'Not only in time of persecution or when we have the chance of martyrdom, but in all circumstances, in everything we do and think, in everything we say, let us deny what we used to be and let us confess what we now are, reborn as we have been in Christ' (*Epistola* 121, 3) [...]. Do you see? The daily cross. No day with a cross; not a single day in which we are not to carry the cross of the Lord, in which we are not to accept his yoke" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 58 & 176). "There is no doubt about it: a person who loves pleasure, who seeks comfort, who flies from anything that might spell suffering, who is over-anxious, who complains, who blames and who becomes impatient at the least little thing which does not go his way—a person like that is a Christian only in name; he is only a dishonor to his religion, for Jesus Christ has said so: Anyone who wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up this cross every day of his life, and follow me" (St John Mary Vianney, *Selected Sermons*, Ash Wednesday).

The Cross should be present not only in the life of every Christian but also at the crossroads of the world: "How beautiful are those crosses on the summits of high mountains, and crowning great monuments, and on the pinnacles of cathedrals...! But the Cross must also be inserted in the very heart of the world.

"Jesus wants to be raised on high, there in the noise of the factories and workshops, in the silence of libraries, in the loud clamor of the streets, in the stillness of the fields, in the intimacy of the family, in crowded gatherings, in stadiums...Wherever there is a Christian striving to lead an honorable life, he should, with his love, set up the Cross of Christ, who attracts all things to himself" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way of the Cross*, XI, 3). †

SIMPLE TRUTHS



Fulton J. Sheen

"Our Lord gave the injunction, '*Take up your cross daily and follow Me*' (cf. Luke 9:23). First it is to be noted that the cross is personal. Most of us are willing to take up our own crosses - those that we have fitted to our own shoulders - but few there are who, like the Savior, are willing to take the cross that is handed to them." †

A POPE'S ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

CHRISTOPHER KACZOR*

He was in third grade when his mother died; his only sibling, an older brother, died three years later; he discovered his father dead on the floor in their apartment. Karol Wojtyla was an orphan at twenty. Nor were his troubles were not limited to the loss of his whole family. The Nazis overran his country, and he did hard labor in a stone quarry. During the Nazi rule, many of his friends were killed, some in concentration camps, others shot by the Gestapo for the crime of studying for the priesthood. He was run down by a German truck and nearly died. When the Nazis finally left his beloved Poland, he and his countrymen again came under the rule of a dictator when the iron boot of Joseph Stalin replaced that of Adolf Hitler. Later in life, his beloved Church was torn apart by the storm that followed the Second Vatican Council. At sixty, an Islamic assassin shot him in his own front yard, and he nearly died again. As an old man, he suffered from debilitating Parkinson's disease that rendered him immobile, distorted his physical appearance, and finally took his ability to speak. Pope John Paul II knew about human suffering.

Yet, as was evident to all who saw him, he was a man overflowing with joy. He experienced the mystery of suffering and the affliction endured by every single human person, but he also discovered the meaning of suffering. He had found an "answer" to the problem of pain.

AN INESCAPABLE FEATURE

He explored this theme in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering). Suffering is part of human existence from birth until death, and every human person suffers in a variety of ways: physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. The Bible provides many examples: one's own death, the danger of death, the death of children or friends, sterility, homesickness, persecution, mockery, scorn, loneliness, abandonment, remorse, watching the wicked prosper while the just suffer, the unfaithfulness of spouse and friends, and the misfortunes of one's homeland (SD 6). Suffering in one form or another accompanies each of us every day. It is an inescapable feature of human existence.

Suffering naturally leads to questioning. Why do I suffer? Why do others suffer? How can suffering be overcome? Is there any meaning to suffering? To find an answer, John Paul turned to revelation:

In order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: We are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. 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. In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering . . . we must above all accept the light of revelation. . . . Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the cross of Jesus Christ. (SD 13)

For John Paul, the story of Jesus Christ is the story of humanity. Every human life is a question, and it is the Lord who answers the question. Therefore we must look to Christ to understand the meaning of suffering. But our understanding of God is fragile and incomplete, because we are not capable of comprehending pure love and goodness. It follows, then, that our understanding of suffering cannot be definitive. This is especially true



As an old man, he suffered from debilitating Parkinson's disease that rendered him immobile, distorted his physical appearance, and finally took his ability to speak. Pope John Paul II knew about human suffering.



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A Pope's Answer to the Problem of Pain (Continued on page 14)

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when we are dealing with suffering in its subjective dimension. Words fall far short when we are undergoing suffering, and reasoning cannot remedy the profound sense of the offensiveness of suffering.

In looking for an answer to the "problem of pain," the Pope avoided reducing all suffering to a single justification but looked at various aspects and meanings of suffering. Reducing suffering to a single solution does not do justice to its complexities.

CHARITY

Sometimes suffering makes an important good possible. If God eliminated that suffering, the corresponding good also would be eliminated.

We could say that suffering . . . is present in order to unleash love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love that stirs in his heart and actions. (SD 29)

HUMILITY

Suffering can bring us closer to what is good and can draw us away from obstacles to achieving happiness. Pain can prompt rehabilitation, a turning from evil to embrace stronger relationships with others and with God (SD 12). Suffering breaks down that most fundamental of human proclivities: our desire to be God. The atheistic existentialist Jean Paul Sartre wrote: "To be man is to reach toward being God. Or, if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God." The original sin of Adam and Eve was an attempt to reorder the universe so they could determine what is good and what is evil. This is replicated in every human sin. The sinner orders the universe according to his own will and sets aside the will of God. Suffering is redemptive in part because it reveals to man that he is not God, rendering him more receptive to the divine:

To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ. In him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self. (SD 23)

Only when we are weak do many of us rely on God and explicitly repudiate our own divine ambitions.

TRANSFORMATION

History provides many examples of sinners transformed into saints through suffering.

Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace. To this grace many saints, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and others, owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of his entire life and vocation. (SD 26)

It may be that some suffering is permitted by God as a way of waking someone from a dream of self-sufficiency or illusory happiness. Life-saving surgery is painful.

PUNISHMENT

Often our sinful actions lead directly to painful repercussions—the drinking binge leads to the hangover, unreasonable anger to injured relationships, laziness to lack of achievement. Suffering can serve as punishment for wrongdoing, a just retribution for personal sins.

The friends of Job sought to universalize this judgment, falsely concluding that all suffering is the direct result of a person's sin. If Job is punished, they reasoned, he must have sinned against God. But the innocent do suffer:

While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment. The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament. (SD 11)

In the New Testament, Christ teaches the same truth by his Passion. The Lamb of God—who is entirely

A Pope's Answer to the Problem of Pain (Continued on page 15)

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without fault—endured rejection, beating, taunting, flogging, and crucifixion at the hands of evil men. By suffering himself, the Son of God removed the moral stigma from suffering. No longer could it be said that personal suffering always indicates moral failure nor that it is a sign of God's abandonment or disfavor.

CHRIST'S SUFFERING

Christ strikes at the root of our sin and our suffering by overcoming evil with good. Indeed, the suffering of Christ overcomes the worst possible suffering of the human person—permanent alienation from God, the source and summit of all goodness. All suffering in this life—like all happiness—is imperfect, partial, and finite. Even the worst possible human life, spread over the longest spans, comes to an end. Hell does not. It lasts forever. In comparison to the pains of hell, the worst human suffering on earth pales. Jesus saves his people from hell.

The only begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against definitive suffering. In his salvific mission, the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history. These transcendental roots of evil are grounded in sin and death: for they are at the basis of the loss of eternal life. The mission of the only begotten Son consists in conquering sin and death. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection. (SD 14)

Jesus saves us from the suffering by entering into it. The physical pain endured by Christ is well beyond what most of us have personally experienced: beaten by soldiers, imprisoned, scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns, forced to carry the cross, and finally dying by crucifixion.

His suffering has human dimensions; it also is unique in the history of humanity—a depth and intensity that, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only begotten Son himself: "God from God." Therefore, only he—the only begotten Son—is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: In every sin and in "total" sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth. (SD 17)

John Paul echoes a long tradition, going back at least to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, that the physical, mental, and spiritual suffering of Christ was the greatest human suffering possible. In addition to the physical pain of the passion, he endured the greatest pain of all: alienation from the heavenly Father caused by the totality of human sin.

SUFFERING AND SALVATION

What comes of this great suffering? What is its purpose in the divine plan? From the greatest possible evil, God brings about the greatest good: the salvation of the human family, redemption from pain and suffering for those who do not merit it.

Precisely by means of this suffering [Jesus] must bring it about "that man should not perish, but have eternal life." Precisely by means of his cross he must strike at the roots of evil, planted in the history of man and in human souls. Precisely by means of his cross he must accomplish the work of salvation. (SD 16)

The suffering of Christ redeems suffering itself and opens up the possibility that the sufferer can share in the redemptive work of Christ (SD 19). The suffering of Christ leads to his glory; so, too, does the suffering of Christians. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:10–11). John Paul wrote:

Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. . . . Christ has accomplished the world's redemption through his own suffering. For, at the same time, this redemption, even though it was completely achieved by Christ's suffering, lives on and in its own special way develops in the history of man. It lives and develops as the body of Christ, the Church, and in this dimension every human suffering, by reason of the loving union with Christ, completes the suffering of Christ. It completes that suffering just as the Church completes the redemptive work of Christ. (SD 24)

The Christian approach to the problem of pain does not imply an indifference to human suffering, and for this reason Christians have always sought to express their faith in charitable works.

Christ's revelation of the salvific meaning of suffering is in no way identified with an attitude of passivity.

A Pope's Answer to the Problem of Pain (Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15) **A Pope's Answer to the Problem of Pain**

Completely the reverse is true. The gospel is the negation of passivity in the face of suffering. Christ himself is especially active in this field. (SD 30)

The works of Christ were to restore sight to the blind, heal the leper, and give food to the hungry. He taught that we should love God and neighbor and gave us the parable of the good Samaritan to illustrate the duty of all Christians to look after the needs of others. The final judgment hinges on our care for suffering people:

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (Matt. 25:34-35)

A REASON TO LIVE

Christ's approach to the problem of pain is not an intellectual answer to an academic puzzle. Not every problem is abstract, intellectual, or academic. Theodicy—reconciling the existence of an all-good God with evil—can be tackled in this manner, but the problem of real pain is concrete, experiential, and personal. Its resolution does not come through words but through the Word alone. As the great Pope put it:

Christ does not answer directly and he does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ. The answer that comes through this sharing, by way of the interior encounter with the Master, is in itself something more than the mere abstract answer to the question about the meaning of suffering. For it is above all a call. It is a vocation. Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else he says: "Follow me!" Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my cross. Gradually, as the individual takes up his cross, spiritually uniting himself to the cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. (SD 26)

The author Victor Frankel in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* describes his horrifying experiences in Nazi concentration camps. He notes that although all the prisoners were in the same material circumstances—the most horrible imaginable—they did not all react in the same way. Some prisoners killed themselves by walking into electrified fences; others clung to life and even found joy despite the atrocities occurring around them daily. What made the difference? One way to put it is that man can endure anything if he has a reason (*logos*) to live. Conversely, man can endure nothing if he does not.

A source of joy is found in the overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"; the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of redemption he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. (SD 27).

Christ gives us a reason to live, however much we suffer. †

FRANK ERNEST



Ad Risum Vertere Veritatem*



*Latin for "To turn truth into laughter"

OUR LADY OF THE SOUTH REDNECK CHURCH

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the finance committee refuses to provide funds to purchase a chandelier because none of the members knows how to play one.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....people ask, when they learn that Jesus fed the 5000, whether the two fish were bass or catfish, and what bait was used to catch 'em.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....when the pastor says, "I'd like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering," five guys and two women stand up.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....opening day of deer season is recognized as an official church holiday.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....a member of the church requests to be buried in his 4-wheel-drive truck because "It ain't never been in a hole it couldn't get out of."

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the choir is known as the "OK Chorale".

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....in a congregation of 500 members, there are only seven last names in the church directory.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....Baptism is referred to as "branding".

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....high notes on the organ set the dogs on the floor to howling.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....people think "rapture" is what you get when you lift something too heavy.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the baptismal pool is a #2 galvanized washtub.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the choir robes were donated by (and embroidered with the logo from) Billy Bob's Barbecue.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the collection plates are really hub caps from a '56 Chevy.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....instead of a bell, you are called to service by a duck call.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the communion wine is Boone's Farm "Tickled Pink".

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if...."Thou shalt not "covet" applies to hunting dogs, too.

You Know Your Church Is A Redneck Church if....the final words of the benediction are, "Y'all come back now!! Ya Hear!" †





**THOUGHT
FOR
THE
DAY**

TRUSTING OUR MASTER

A sick man turned to his doctor, as he was preparing to leave then examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know."

"You don't know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?"

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side of which came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing...I know my Master is there and that is enough."

May today there be peace within you. †

MORE ON ADVERSITY



**THE
WRITINGS
OF
THOMAS
MORE**

Just as this most welcome harvest was completed and all of More's barns were full, a fire broke out, caused "by the negligence of one of his neighbors' carts." The result was the destruction of all of More's barns, part of his house, and several of the neighbors' barns as well.

Lady Alice immediately sent son-in-law Giles Heron to inform her husband. Sir Thomas was at court, attending the King. While Giles stood by, More wrote a quick response. Given the spontaneous, unpremeditated character of its composition, this letter is of special value. Written just seven weeks before he would become Lord Chancellor of England, it reveals More's true mind and character. Few could have written such a letter, having just suffered such crippling losses.

More begins the letter by sympathizing with Alice. But then he points out that, God having allowed this to happen, "we must and are bound not only to be content but also to be glad [of His will]." After all, it was God who "sent us all that we have lost and since He has by such a chance taken it away again, His pleasure be fulfilled."

... "Let us," he says, "heartily thank [God] as well for adversity as for prosperity, and perhaps we have more cause to thank Him for our loss than for our gain, for His wisdom sees better what is good for us than we do ourselves."... "Therefore I pray you be of good cheer and take all the household with you to church and there thank God both for what He has given us and for what He has taken from us and for what He has left us—which, if it pleases Him, He can increase when He will; and if it pleases Him to leave us yet less, so let it be at His pleasure."

More next asks that Alice find out what their neighbors lost and assure them that he will compensate them for it. If it meant that any "poor neighbor of mine" would bear a loss because of something that "happened in my house," he writes, "I would not leave myself a spoon."

MESSAGE FROM HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
For the Sixteenth World Day of the Sick
January 11, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

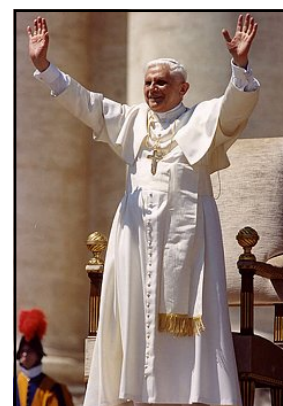
1. On 11 February, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, the World Day of the Sick will be celebrated, a propitious occasion to reflect on the meaning of pain and the Christian duty to take responsibility for it in whatever situation it arises. This year this significant day is connected to two important events for the life of the Church, as one already understands from the theme chosen, "*The Eucharist, Lourdes and Pastoral Care for the Sick*": the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Immaculate Mary at Lourdes, and the celebration of the International Eucharistic Congress at Quebec in Canada. In this way, a remarkable opportunity to consider the close connection that exists between the Mystery of the Eucharist, the role of Mary in the project of salvation, and the reality of human pain and suffering is offered to us.

The 150 years since the apparitions of Lourdes invite us to turn our gaze towards the Holy Virgin, whose Immaculate Conception constitutes the sublime and freely-given gift of God to a woman so that she could fully adhere to divine designs with a steady and unshakable faith, despite the tribulations and the sufferings that she would have to face. For this reason, Mary is a model of total self-abandonment to God's will: she received in her heart the eternal Word and she conceived it in her virginal womb; she trusted in God and, with her soul pierced by a sword (cf. Lk 2: 35), she did not hesitate to share the Passion of her Son, renewing on Calvary at the foot of the Cross her "yes" of the Annunciation. To reflect upon the Immaculate Conception of Mary is thus to allow oneself to be attracted by the "yes" which joined her wonderfully to the mission of Christ, Redeemer of humanity; it is to allow oneself to be taken and led by her hand to pronounce in one's turn "*fiat*" to the will of God, with all one's existence interwoven with joys and sadness, hopes and disappointments, in the awareness that tribulations, pain and suffering make rich the meaning of our pilgrimage on the earth.

2. One cannot contemplate Mary without being attracted by Christ and one cannot look at Christ without immediately perceiving the presence of Mary. There is an indissoluble link between the Mother and the Son generated in her womb by the work of the Holy Spirit, and this link we perceive in a mysterious way in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, as the Fathers of the Church and theologians have pointed out from the early centuries onwards. "The flesh born of Mary, coming from the Holy Spirit, is bread descended from heaven", observed St Hilary of Poitiers. In the *Bergomensium Sacramentary* of the ninth century we read: "Her womb made flower a fruit, a bread that has filled us with an angelic gift. Mary restored to salvation what Eve had destroyed by her sin". And St Peter Damiani observed: "That body that the Most Blessed Virgin generated, nourished in her womb with maternal care, that body, I say, without doubt and no other, we now receive from the sacred altar, and we drink its blood as a sacrament of our redemption. This is what the Catholic faith believes, this the holy Church faithfully teaches". The link of the Holy Virgin with the Son, the sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, is extended to the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Mary, observes the Servant of God John Paul II, is a "woman of the Eucharist" in her



FROM
PETER'S
SUCCESSOR,
POPE
BENEDICT XVI



(Continued from page 19) *Papal Message*

whole life, as a result of which the Church, seeing Mary as her model, "is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery" (Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 53). In this perspective one understands even further why in Lourdes the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary is joined to a strong and constant reference to the Eucharist with daily celebrations of the Eucharist, with adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and with the blessing of the sick, which constitutes one of the strongest moments of the visit of pilgrims to the grotto of Massabielle.

The presence of many sick pilgrims at Lourdes, and of the volunteers who accompany them, helps us to reflect on the maternal and tender care that the Virgin expresses towards human pain and suffering. Associated with the Sacrifice of Christ, Mary, *Mater Dolorosa*, who at the foot of the Cross suffers with her divine Son, is felt to be especially near by the Christian community, which gathers around its suffering members who bear the signs of the passion of the Lord. Mary suffers with those who are in affliction, with them she hopes, and she is their comfort, supporting them with her maternal help. And is it not perhaps true that the spiritual experience of very many sick people leads us to understand increasingly that "the Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed"? (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 26).

3. If Lourdes leads us to reflect upon the maternal love of the Immaculate Virgin for her sick and suffering children, the next International Eucharistic Congress will be an opportunity to worship Jesus Christ present in the Sacrament of the Altar, to entrust ourselves to him as Hope that does not disappoint, to receive him as that medicine of immortality which heals the body and the spirit.

Jesus Christ redeemed the world through his suffering, death and Resurrection, and he wanted to remain with us as the "bread of life" on our earthly pilgrimage. *"The Eucharist, Gift of God for the Life of the World"*: this is the theme of the Eucharistic Congress and it emphasizes how the Eucharist is the gift that the Father makes to the world of his Only Son, incarnated and crucified. It is he who gathers us around the Eucharistic table, provoking in his disciples loving care for the suffering and the sick, in whom the Christian community recognizes the Face of its Lord. As I pointed out in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*: "Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken" for others" (n. 88). We are thus encouraged to commit ourselves in the first person to helping our brethren, especially those in difficulty, because the vocation of every Christian is truly that of being, together with Jesus, bread that is broken for the life of the world.

4. It thus appears clear that it is specifically from the Eucharist that pastoral care in health must draw the necessary spiritual strength to come effectively to man's aid and to help him to understand the salvific value of his own suffering. As the Servant of God John Paul II would write in the already quoted Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, the Church sees in her suffering brothers and sisters as it were a multiple subject of the supernatural power of Christ (cf. n. 27). Mysteriously united to Christ, the one who suffers with love and meek self-abandonment to the will of God becomes a living offering for the salvation of the world. My beloved Predecessor also stated that:

Papal Message (Continued on page 21)



MATER DOLOROSA
Hans Baldung Grien
(1516)

(Continued from page 20) *Papal Message*

"The more a person is threatened by sin, the heavier the structures of sin which today's world brings with it, the greater is the eloquence which human suffering possesses in itself. And the more the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world" (*ibid.*). If, therefore, at Quebec the mystery of the Eucharist, the gift of God for the life of the world, is contemplated during the World Day of the Sick in an ideal spiritual parallelism, not only will the actual participation of human suffering in the salvific work of God be celebrated, but the valuable fruits promised to those who believe can in a certain sense be enjoyed. Thus, pain, received with faith, becomes the door by which to enter the mystery of the redemptive suffering of Jesus and to reach with him the peace and happiness of his Resurrection.

While I extend my cordial greetings to all sick people and to all those who take care of them in various ways, I invite the diocesan and parish communities to celebrate this coming World Day of the Sick by appreciating to the full the happy coinciding of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes with the International Eucharistic Congress. May it be an occasion to emphasize the importance of the Holy Mass, of adoration of the Eucharist and of the cult of the Eucharist, so that chapels in our health-care centers become a beating heart in which Jesus offers himself unceasingly to the Father for the life of humanity! The distribution of the Eucharist to the sick as well, done with decorum and in a spirit of prayer, is true comfort for those who suffer, afflicted by all forms of infirmity.

May the next World Day of the Sick be in addition a propitious occasion to invoke in a special way the maternal protection of Mary over those who are weighed down by illness, on health-care workers and workers in pastoral health care! I think in particular of priests involved in this field, women and men religious, volunteers and all those who with active dedication are concerned to serve in body and soul the sick and those in need. I entrust all to Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, the Immaculate Conception. May she help everyone in testifying that the only valid response to human pain and suffering is Christ, who by rising defeated death and gave us life that knows no end. With these feelings, from my heart I impart to everyone my special Apostolic Blessing. †



MAN OF SUFFERING

*Jacob Cornelisz
Van Oostanen*

(Date Unknown)

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THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

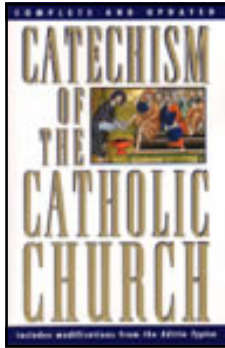
PART TWO: THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

SECTION TWO: THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER TWO: THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

ARTICLE 4: THE SACRAMENTS OF PENANCE & RECONCILIATION

V. THE MANY FORMS OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE



CATECHISM CORNER

1434 The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."

1435 Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.

1436 Eucharist and Penance. Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of Christ which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. "It is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins."

1437 Reading Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Our Father - every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins.

1438 The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

1439 The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father: the fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy - all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life - pure worthy, and joyful - of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart Of Christ Who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way. †



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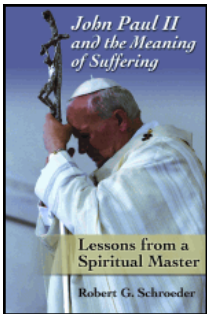


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By: Robert Schroeder

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