

FINDING GOD IN SUFFERING

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CHAPTER 1

The Encounter with Suffering

Diagnosing the Disease

1. Where has suffering entered into my life? How has it touched my family or community?
2. Have I honestly confronted God with the question of “Why?” What kinds of fears can hold me back?
3. Where have I gone to seek a “remedy” for the wounds I have received in the past? Where do I desire to go in the future?

O GOD, YOU CREATED us in love and made us for yourself. Our bodies and souls are a gift from you and you direct our lives so that we may share in your love and your life. In those places where we feel the wounds of the brokenness of this world, give us your strength and the healing that we long for. Help us to recognize you in the midst of our pain, and to know that you are near. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

The Problem of Evil

Distortion of the Good

1. Have I experienced a “ground zero” moment in my life? Have such moments in the world around me affected my life and relationships?

2. Where do I see a lack or distortion of the good in the world around me? What is my initial reaction to this evil? What is the response I want to have?
3. What are some ways I can invite God into the midst of the emptiness and pain in my life?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, our lives are often fragile and vulnerable to the tragic moments of evil and sorrow that can happen in our world. It can be so difficult to find you in the darkness when everything seems to be moving in the wrong direction. Help us to recognize that you are present in our lives and calling out to us in our loneliness and pain. You are the light shining in our darkness. May we always place our faith, hope, and love in you. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Transcendence and Hope

The Search for Meaning

1. Have I ever experienced a moment of transcendence in an otherwise dark period of my life? Has there been a time in my suffering when God's presence broke through?
2. How might God be inviting me to grow in the virtue of hope? How can I live out the virtue of hope in a practical way in my life at this time?
3. How has God been faithful to me in the past? Can I recall any particular moments when his hand guided me and helped me to find true peace?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, when we stumble in the darkness we often feel alone and afraid. We search for you and for some sense of comfort. Your love reminds us that long before we ever turn to you, we are already being sought after and cared for. Help us to recognize how you are present in our suffering. Give us new hope that we will never be alone because we will never be without you. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Castles East of Eden

Freedom's Sacred Space

1. Where have I experienced the effects of sin that have brought suffering into my own life or the lives of those around me?
2. Where are some of the places that I can recognize Jesus Christ as a source of healing for myself and others?
3. How can I more fully cooperate with God in rebuilding my life and the world around me?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you have created us in love and given us freedom to imitate you in your goodness. Have mercy on us and help us when we misuse that freedom and turn aside from the path you have shown us. May we experience your healing touch and come to recognize the many ways you rebuild our fallen world and repair our broken lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Growth in Suffering

A Difficult and Enlightening Path

1. What is my reaction when I hear suffering described as a lesson to be learned?
2. Have I ever experienced a new beginning or healing after suffering and loss? Do I sense God's work of restoration in my own life at this time?
3. Have I ever learned a valuable lesson from suffering endured? How has suffering had an influence on shaping me as a person?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, sin wearies us and sorrows weigh us down as we struggle to find our way to you. Often we struggle to find meaning and purpose and we seek to know your consoling presence in our lives. Help us to recognize you in the daily circumstances of life, teaching us that you have come into the world not to condemn, but to save and give new life. Give us the courage to walk in the freedom of the children of God. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Innocent Suffering

Seeking Balance in a Broken World

1. Has the suffering of the innocent ever challenged my faith in a loving God?

2. How has the suffering of Christ changed me? How has it touched the world in which we live?
3. Has my faith changed the way that I consider and care for the innocent who suffer in the world each day?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, the suffering in this world often wearies us, but the suffering of the innocent weighs on our souls. We long for answers and consolation, but especially for the peace and goodness that only you can give. Remember us when we encounter the evil of innocent suffering and help us to find our strength in you and to discover new life. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Light in the Darkness

Finding Love in an Unlikely Place

1. Have I ever witnessed or experienced a time when love was freely added to a difficult situation? How did it change things?
2. How does Christ's incarnation touch my life personally and help me to see the fruits of God's love in my life?
3. What are some ways we can still use our freedom even when facing great challenges and suffering?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, we are easily discouraged when we look into the world that you created and do not find love. Open

our hearts to welcome you and strengthen our will to bring your love to these difficult places. Give us true freedom to make the choices and decisions that will allow us to be transformed, and help us to change the world we live in for good. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Christ the Redeemer

Overcoming the Ultimate Suffering

1. What is my initial reaction when I consider the reality of death? Where do I find Christ present in my thoughts about that transition from death to eternal life?
2. How might a growing relationship with Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, change my present experience of suffering?
3. When I consider the Beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” what does it stir up in my soul?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you sent Christ your Son to save us and set us free from eternal death and to give us everlasting life with you. Help us to experience even now the power of your love and the life of the resurrection. When our eyes are filled with tears of pain and sorrow, grant us the faith, hope, and love to know that you are near. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 9
Gethsemane

Reclaiming the Garden

1. Where, in the sufferings of Christ, can I identify some of my own experiences of suffering?
2. How might God be calling me to kneel in Gethsemane and unite my will more completely to his will?
3. Are there any sins or failings in my life that I would like to give to God as I seek his healing forgiveness and grace?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you sent your only-begotten Son to be born in Bethlehem to save us from our sins. We are often weighed down by the burdens that we carry and seek the grace of redemption. Come to us in our weakness and teach us once again to use our freedom for our good and your glory. Show us the way to unite our will to yours. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 10
Sign of the Cross
Suffering Redeemed

1. Has suffering ever surprised me or caught me off guard? When I have experienced the cross, what has my initial reaction been?

2. What is my reaction when I hear that my suffering could become a sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ? Does this possibility seem daunting or overwhelming, or comforting?
3. How might my suffering, joined with Christ, become an occasion for the reawakening of my spiritual life? What could pose an obstacle to this reawakening?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, your Son willingly embraced the cross to save us and to bring us new life. Our own experience of the cross is often difficult and even overwhelming. Help us to recognize Jesus in the midst of our suffering, and to know that he is with us. Grant us the courage and the generosity to unite ourselves to him and to participate in the redemption that transforms the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER II

Eucharistic Suffering

Christ, the Good and Loving Pelican

1. In what way does suffering make me needy or hungry for the consolation of God?
2. What is my reaction when I imagine Jesus as needy and suffering even as he is feeding the crowds and teaching them?
3. How might God be calling me to be a source of strength or help for others who are suffering?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, we stand in awe of your love and generosity in giving us your only-begotten Son as food and sustenance. From the midst of his own suffering, Christ fills us with life and gives us strength. Help us to be renewed in the Eucharist and to become wounded healers in our world. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

The “Fortunate” One

The Path to Freedom

1. Have I ever been tempted to remain passive in the midst of the struggles and suffering that I have experienced?
2. What are some of the ways I can exercise my freedom even if the circumstances of my life do not change the way I would like them to?
3. How could my choices make a positive impact on those around me who are suffering?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, when we find ourselves bound and constrained by the difficulties that we face, remind us that you created us to be free. Come into our hearts and help us to recognize that Christ came to give us the true freedom of the children of God. May we trust you in all the circumstances of life. Illumine the path before us and allow us to become the men and women you have always created us to be. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 13
Proof for God

The Heartbeat of Hope

1. Has the evil I have witnessed ever made me doubt the existence of God or call into question the goodness of creation?
2. Where have I experienced Christ's presence and healing touch in the sacraments or elsewhere in my life?
3. Has the Church been a source of healing and strength for me in my suffering, or do I struggle to make this connection?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you are the Author of our faith and our salvation. When we encounter evil we often falter and are beset by doubts. Help us to know that you have created us for good and that you have a plan for our lives. May we recognize your presence in the people we encounter and especially in the sacraments of the Church, so that we can begin to experience the healing touch of the redemption. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 14
The Broken Road
A Way for the Church

1. Have I ever had an encounter with the Church "on the broken road" of suffering?

2. How is God inviting me to walk with and bring consolation to others who are suffering?
3. Where does the Church need to be more attentive to the suffering person today? What are some concrete steps we can take that could make that a reality?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you see us from afar and draw near to us in the person of Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Illumine our hearts and help us to see that you are present to us in the members of your Church and in the sacraments that Christ instituted for our healing. Strengthen us and send us forth as wounded healers in a broken world that is constantly searching for you. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Now I Begin

Finding the Courage to Persevere

1. Have I ever experienced a time when the Holy Spirit consoled me or comforted me in the midst of difficulties? What helped facilitate that?
2. What is my initial reaction when I struggle to pray? How might Jesus want me to approach prayer, especially during times when prayer is difficult?
3. What are some of the most helpful ways that I have found to “begin again” after failure or disappointment? Is there anything I could do differently going forward?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, the sorrows and disappointments of this life can often discourage us and cause our hearts to falter. We seek the shelter and the calm that only you can give. Grant us the strength and courage to begin again, knowing that you are always ready to receive us. Lead us to the safe harbor of salvation and help us to be your instruments in the lives of all who suffer. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Presence and Participation

God Working in and Through Our Suffering

- I can identify as a “land of gloom”? How might Christ shine a light into that darkness?
2. Have I ever been able to recognize Christ’s sufferings in my or another person’s sufferings?
 3. What would it look like if I united my sufferings to the sufferings of the cross?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, we sometimes feel like we are in the land of darkness and we long for your light and love. You sent your Son to dwell among us and to take on our suffering and sorrow. Teach us to recognize your Son in the sufferings we experience and help us to offer ourselves to you in love through all the contradictions in life. With you as our guide may we find true peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

The Patience of God

Perseverance in the Face of Evil

1. Have I ever suffered because of the patience of God, waiting for him to act in my life? What did I feel at the time? How do I feel about it now?
2. Can I point to examples in my life or in the world where bad situations turned out better over time?
3. When I reflect on the parable of the weeds and the wheat, what is my reaction to the owner's patience in not uprooting the weeds right away? How does the patience of God inspire me to approach the difficult situations in my life?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, we are often overwhelmed by the evil that happens in the world and desire that you would act more quickly to bring us peace. Help us to wait upon your mercy and to see you acting in the concrete circumstances of our lives. May we have the gift of patient vigilance, watching for your Providence and living in your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

Encounter with the Living God

Sharing in the Suffering of Christ

1. Have I ever experienced a “Damascus moment” of encountering Christ in an unexpected way? How has this experience carried over into other areas of my life?

2. What are some of the insights I have learned on the “long road” or journey of my own sufferings?
3. Have I ever thought of sharing in Christ’s redemptive suffering as a call or a vocation? Can I think of any concrete ways to live out this calling more intentionally?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, we thank you that you have called us to participate in the life of Jesus, your Son. Thank you that he who is fully human and fully divine draws near to us in our suffering and gives us consolation and strength. Help us to hear his voice and respond generously to his call to intimacy and a sharing in the work of the redemption. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Suffering for Christ

The Cross of Martyrdom

1. Have I ever experienced a time when I suffered for my faith in Christ or for being a member of the Church?
2. In moments of suffering, where have I experienced the nearness of Christ? Has this ever taken on an unexpected form?
3. What are some of the ways that I can keep the light of faith burning brightly when I face difficulties and challenges in life?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, as we seek to follow Christ we sometimes encounter hostility, difficulties, and the cross. We falter when we encounter so many obstacles and challenges in our lives. Give us courage to live our faith with generosity and hope in the face of our affliction. Help us to experience even now that love that will culminate in union with you for all eternity. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

Suffering with Christ

Listening for God's Voice

1. When I meditate on conversion, what do I feel God calling me to turn away from or to turn toward at this time in my life?
2. Do I find it more difficult to pray when I am suffering? Have there been times when the experience of suffering has helped me to hear God more clearly?
3. What stirs in me when I hear that Christ wants me to personally take part in his work of redemption? What would a full response to this invitation look like?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, the crosses we face in life are often mysterious and overwhelming. We search for meaning and purpose in our trials and we long to experience your consolation and peace. Grant us a deeper faith and trust in you and help us to hear your voice as we follow you on the path of salvation. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 2 I

Set Free

The Descending Meaning of Suffering

1. How is God calling to me in my suffering today?
2. What are some of the ways that I feel inspired to help unbind and loosen the knots of those around me?
3. As I continue to contend with the mystery of suffering in my life, what is one concrete resolution I desire to make for the journey ahead?

O GOD, ALMIGHTY FATHER, you sent your only-begotten Son to suffer and die to save us from our sins. We long to enter more completely into that salvation and to be set free from the bonds that keep us from living a full Christian life. Help us to cooperate with your grace and experience your healing in our lives. May we become your instruments in the lives of those around us. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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APPENDIX I

Sacred Scripture on Suffering and Hope

It is the LORD who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed.

— DEUTERONOMY 31:8



Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

— JOSHUA 1:9



How long, O LORD? Wilt thou forget me for ever?

How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him";

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in thy steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

— PSALM 13



The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
 he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
 he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow
 of death,
 I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
 thy rod and thy staff,
 they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil,
 my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
 for ever.

— PSALM 23



Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause
 against an ungodly people;
from deceitful and unjust men
 deliver me!
For thou art the God in whom I take refuge;
 why hast thou cast me off?

Why go I mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?

Oh send out thy light and thy truth;
let them lead me,
let them bring me to thy holy hill
and to thy dwelling!

Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy;
and I will praise thee with the lyre,
O God, my God.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

— PSALM 43



He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
 ten thousand at your right hand;
 but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes
 and see the recompense of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
 the Most High your habitation,
no evil shall befall you,
 no scourge come near your tent.

For he will give his angels charge of you
 to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
 lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder,
 the young lion and the serpent you will trample
 under foot.

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;
 I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
 I will be with him in trouble,
 I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him,
 and show him my salvation.

— PSALM 91



I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
 who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber.

Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade
on your right hand.

The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.

— PSALM 121



Out of the depths I cry to thee, O LORD!
Lord, hear my voice!

Let thy ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the LORD
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

— PSALM 130



Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hid from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary,
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

— ISAIAH 40:27-31



Fear not, for I am with you,
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

— ISAIAH 41:10



But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters I will be with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you.”

— ISAIAH 43:1-2



But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me,
 my Lord has forgotten me.”
“Can a woman forget her sucking child,
 that she should have no compassion on the son of her
womb?
Even these may forget,
 yet I will not forget you.
Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands;
 your walls are continually before me.”

— ISAIAH 49:14-16



“O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,
 behold, I will set your stones in antimony,
 and lay your foundations with sapphires.
I will make your pinnacles of agate,

your gates of carbuncles,
and all your wall of precious stones.
All your sons shall be taught by the LORD,
and great shall be the prosperity of your sons.
In righteousness you shall be established;
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.”

— ISAIAH 54:11-14



For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart.

— JEREMIAH 29:11-13



I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

— JEREMIAH 31:3



Remember my affliction and my bitterness,
the wormwood and the gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

— LAMENTATIONS 3:19–24



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be
comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for right-
eousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called
sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteous-
ness’ 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.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for
so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

— MATTHEW 5:3–12



“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

— MATTHEW 11:28–30



“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

— JOHN 14:27



“I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

— JOHN 16:33



Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

— ROMANS 5:1–5



I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

— ROMANS 8:18



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

— 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4



But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

— 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-10



I have been crucified with Christ; 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.

— GALATIANS 2:20



Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11



I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

— PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11 NRSV



Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

— PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

— COLOSSIANS 1:24



Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

— HEBREWS 12:1-2



Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

— JAMES 1:2-4



Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

— I PETER 4:12-13



Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.

— 1 PETER 5:6-7



Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

— REVELATION 21:1-5

APPENDIX II

Prayers for Times of Suffering

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel

Saint Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and the other evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Prayer to One's Guardian Angel

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here. Ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Lead Kindly Light

Saint John Henry Newman, 1801–1890

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;

I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

Prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you.

Let nothing frighten you.

All things pass.

God never changes.

Patience obtains all things.

He who has God lacks nothing.

God alone suffices.

Prayer Before the Crucifix

Saint Francis of Assisi, 1181–1226

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me
true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command. Amen.

I Am Desperate

Saint Anselm of Canterbury, ca. 1033–1109

I am desperate for your love, Lord. My heart is aflame with fervent passion. When I remember the good things you have done, my heart burns with desire to embrace you. I thirst for you; I hunger for you; I long for you; I sigh for you. I am jealous of your love. What shall I say to you? What can I do for you? Where shall I seek you? I am sick for your love. The joy of my heart turns to dust. My happy laughter is reduced to ashes. I want you. I hope for you. My soul is like a widow, bereft of you. Turn to me, and see my tears. Come now, Lord, and I will be comforted. Show me your face, and I shall be saved. Enter my room, and I shall be satisfied. Reveal your beauty, and my joy will be complete.

An Easter Oblation

Fr. Christopher Mahar

She had listened with wonder
To the words of the prophet
About swords piercing,
Battling kingdoms falling
And rising, hearts revealed
To heaven and earth

Meanings lay deep within
As suddenly her heart broke open
To see life wrapped in death
Eternity expended in time, her
Redeemer at her breast, breathless

Dawn slept then in the darkness
Of earth while faith gently taught
Love where to turn and how to hope
Offering herself in sweet labor,
Remembering the promises
Of ages and fathers and children
Set firmly upon an undying word:
Again

APRIL 9, 2012

The Way of the Cross

By Blessed James Alberione (*adapted*)

V. We adore you, O Christ and we bless you.

R. Because by your cross you have redeemed the world.

Let us pray.

O Lord, look upon your family, for whose sake our Lord Jesus Christ unhesitatingly suffered betrayal into the hands of the wicked and underwent the torment of the cross. Who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

ACT OF CONTRITION

My most merciful Jesus, kneeling before you, I ask pardon with all my heart for my sins, which I especially deplore and detest because they are an offense to your infinite goodness. I resolve to choose to die rather than to offend you again, even more, I resolve to love you above all things until death.

Have mercy on us, O Lord.

Have mercy on us.

Holy Mother, pierce me through; in my heart, each wound renew of my Savior crucified.

At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last.

THE FIRST STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

The innocent Jesus accepts for the glory of God and peace to humanity, the unjust sentence of death pronounced against him by Pilate.

Most loving Jesus, for your love and in penance for my sins, I accept my death with all the pain and sorrow that will accompany it. May your will and not mine be done, O Lord.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Through her heart his sorrow sharing, all his bitter anguish bearing, now at length the sword had passed.

THE SECOND STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Jesus takes the cross upon his shoulders. Jesus Master invites us: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

I want to follow you, O Divine Master, by denying myself and accepting my daily cross. Draw me to yourself, O Lord. The road is narrow, but it leads to heaven. Jesus, be my guide and my comfort on my journey through life.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Oh, how sad and sore distressed was that Mother highly blest of the sole-begotten one!

THE THIRD STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Wearied by the agony of Gethsemane, tortured by the scourging and the crowning with thorns, exhausted by

fasting, Jesus falls for the first time beneath the enormous weight of the cross.

Jesus fell to sustain those who fall. Lead us not into temptation, O Lord, but deliver us from all evil.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Christ above in torment hangs; she beneath beholds the pangs of her dying glorious Son.

THE FOURTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Carrying the cross, Jesus meets his Mother, whose soul is pierced by a sword of sorrow. The hearts of Jesus and Mary are united in the same suffering.

Behold the two hearts that have so greatly loved all people. O most sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary, I offer you my whole heart that it may always be yours.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Is there one who would not weep, 'whelmed in miseries so deep, Christ's dear Mother to behold?

THE FIFTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

With false compassion, the soldiers forced a certain passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, to take up the cross of Jesus.

I too am called to cooperate in the redemption of the world, completing with my sufferings the passion of Jesus Christ (cf. Col 1:24). Accept my small offerings, O good Master, and purify them in your love.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Can the human heart refrain from partaking in her pain, in that Mother's pain untold?

THE SIXTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

With heartfelt compassion, Veronica wipes the face of Jesus, and he rewards her by leaving the impression of his face on the towel.

I see in this devout disciple the model of those who offer atonement for sins. I ask you, O Lord, for a spirit of penance in order to make reparation for my sins and for the sins of others. O Jesus, grant me a share in the virtues you practiced while you lived on earth.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled, she beheld her tender child all with bloody scourges rent.

THE SEVENTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

A second time, Jesus's strength fails him and he who was "a man of suffering" (Is 53:3) falls a second time beneath the cross.

O good Master, thus do you atone for our repeated sins, committed either deliberately or out of weakness. Lord, I repent of my sins. Help me to avoid all sin in the future.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

For the sins of his own nation she saw him hang in desolation till his spirit forth he sent.

THE EIGHTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

A large crowd and many women who were weeping for him, followed Jesus. He said to them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children" (Lk 23:28).

I humble myself for my many sins and for those which others have committed because of my bad example and negligence. My Jesus, grant me the grace to help others avoid sin, through my actions, example, word, and prayer.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

O my Mother, fount of love, touch my spirit from above; make my heart with yours accord.

THE NINTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Jesus falls the third time beneath the cross. The weight crushes him and he can hardly get up.

When I keep falling into the same sin, Lord, give me the strength to break away from it. Help me to avoid sin in the future and to be faithful to the grace you offer me to follow in all things.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Make me feel as you have felt, make my soul to glow and melt with the love of Christ my Lord.

THE TENTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Having reached Calvary, Jesus is stripped of his garments and given a bitter mixture of gall and myrrh to drink.

Jesus, you suffered so much for us! Keep my heart free of anything that would lead me away from you. Grant me the grace to seek you only, my supreme and eternal happiness.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Holy Mother, pierce me through; in my heart each wound renew of my Savior crucified.

THE ELEVENTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

The executioners nail Jesus to the cross beneath the gaze of his most sorrowful Mother, causing him unspeakable agony.

Jesus, thank you for giving your life for us. I want to be your disciple always. O Jesus, do not let me separate myself from you.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Let me share with you his pain, who for all my sins was slain, who for me in torment died.

THE TWELFTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

Jesus suffers indescribable pains for three hours and then dies on the cross for our sins.

The death of Jesus is renewed every day on our altars in holy Mass. Most loving Jesus, grant me devotion to holy Mass. May I participate in it often and with the dispositions that your Holy Mother had at the foot of the cross.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

Let me mingle tears with you, mourning him who mourned for me all the days that I may live.

THE THIRTEENTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

The sorrowful Mary receives her Son into her arms, after he was taken down from the cross.

Mary contemplates the wounds of Jesus with immense sorrow and love, and offers her suffering in union with his.

O Mother, accept me as your child. Accompany me throughout my life. Assist me daily and especially in the hour of my death.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

By the cross with you to stay, there with you to weep and pray, is all I ask of you to give.

THE FOURTEENTH STATION

We adore you, O Christ, etc.

The body of Jesus, anointed with spices, is brought to the sepulcher. With strong faith, Mary awaited the resurrection of her Son, as he had foretold.

I firmly believe, my God, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as I believe in the resurrection of the dead. Every day I want to arise to a new life so as to merit to arise in the glory of the last day.

Have mercy on us, etc.

Holy Mother, etc.

*While my body here decays, may my soul your goodness praise, safe
in paradise with you. Amen.*

V. Save us, O Christ our Savior, through the power of
your cross.

R. You who saved Peter on the sea, have mercy on us.

Let us pray.

O God, you sanctified the standard of the life-
bestowing cross with the precious blood of your only
begotten Son. Grant that those who joyfully honor the
holy cross may everywhere rejoice in your protection.
Through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

APPENDIX III
Further Resources on Suffering

- Paul Chaloux. *Why All People Suffer: How a Loving God Uses Suffering to Perfect Us*. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2021.
- Kris Frank. *Hope Always: Our Anchor in Life's Storms*. Pauline Books & Media, 2020.
- Victor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston, Beacon Press, 2006.
- Benedict J. Groeschel, CFR. *Arise from Darkness: What to Do When Life Doesn't Make Sense*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- Kathryn Hermes, FSP. *Reclaim Regret: How God Heals Life's Disappointments*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2018.
- Saint John Paul II. *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. Anniversary Edition with commentary by Myles Sheehan. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2014.
- Peter Kreeft. *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1986.
- C. S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: HarperOne, 2015.
- Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Image Doubleday, 1979.
- Philippe de la Trinité. *What Is Redemption: How Christ's Suffering Saves Us*. Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2021.

Margaret M. Turek. *Atonement: Soundings in Biblical, Trinitarian, and Spiritual Theology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022.

Leonora Wilson, FSP. *Essential Healing Prayers for Peace and Strength*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2021.

INTRODUCTION

Salvific Suffering

A Redeeming Force

The following Sunday, from his room in the Policlinico Gemelli hospital, he sent a brief, pre-recorded message to be played for vigilant pilgrims in St. Peter's: "I pray for that brother of ours who shot me, and whom I have sincerely pardoned. United with Christ, priest and victim, I offer my sufferings for the Church and for the world."

1. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, no. 20 (Vatican), May 18, 1981.

One man's personal struggle with evil and the cross would become a gift for those immersed in what he described as the "world of suffering."

2. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris: On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1984), no. 8.

Pope Benedict XVI, describing the ailing Saint John Paul II, explained how "he showed us that suffering accepted for love of Christ, for love of God and of others is a redeeming force, a force of love and no less powerful than the great deeds he accomplished in the first part of his Pontificate."

3. Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone," *The Holy*

See, August 6, 2008, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080806_clero-bressanone.html

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that “only the Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question.”

4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 309.

PART I

When We Suffer

CHAPTER I

The Encounter with Suffering

Diagnosing the Disease

Thus, the world of human suffering, says Saint John Paul II, is a highly personal one in which “suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable.”

5. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 5.

Within the experience of isolation and disorientation, “there inevitably arises *the question: Why?*”

6. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 9.

If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.”

7. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948), 1, Q. 2, A. 3.

In *Salvifici Doloris*, Saint John Paul II says that a more complete picture emerges when we are able to perceive the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering.

8. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 5.

Moral suffering, however, is different. Saint John Paul II describes moral suffering as “pain of the soul.”

9. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 5.

In a word, “Man suffers whenever he experiences any kind of evil.”

10. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 7.

CHAPTER 2

The Problem of Evil

Distortion of the Good

Saint John Paul II insists that suffering is always caused by an experience of evil, which he defines as “a certain lack, limitation or distortion of the good.”

11. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 7.

Saint John Paul II, who witnessed the destruction of his homeland in World War II and lived through its aftermath, speaks of “*an incomparable accumulation of sufferings*, even to the possible self-destruction of humanity.”

12. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 8.

He was referring specifically to the threat of nuclear war, but we can also think about the painful reality of what Pope Francis has referred to as the “Third World War fought in pieces.”

13. “Celebration Presided over by Pope Francis at the Military Memorial of Redipuglia on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Outbreak of the First World War,” September 13, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140913_omelia-sacrario-militare-redipuglia.html.

If the first and lowest operation of pain shatters the illusion that all is well, the second shatters the illusion that what we have, whether good or bad in itself, is our own and enough for us. Everyone has noticed how hard it is to turn our thoughts to God when everything is going well with us. We “have all we want” is a terrible saying when “all” does not include God.

14. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 95–96.

Lewis is not naïve or callous in suggesting that God uses pain to speak to us. He acknowledges that pain, what he calls “God’s megaphone” . . .

15. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 93.

CHAPTER 3

Transcendence and Hope

The Search for Meaning

Speaking furtively into his upturned collar, he said, “If our wives could see us now!”

16. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 56.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets,

proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understand how a man who has nothing left in this world may still know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved.

17. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 57.

Mystery, he says, “is something in which I myself am involved” and therefore “by definition, transcends every conceivable technique.”

18. Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having* (London: Collins, 1965), 127.

CHAPTER 4

Castles East of Eden

Freedom's Sacred Space

Nonetheless, it also insists that “suffering cannot be divorced from the sin of the beginnings, from what Saint John calls ‘the sin of the world’ (John 1:29), from the sinful background of the personal actions and social processes in human history.”

19. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 15.

Our only health is the disease
If we obey the dying nurse
Whose constant care is not to please
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

20. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," *Four Quartets*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), 127.

The whole earth is our hospital
Endowed by the ruined millionaire
Wherein, if we do well, we shall
Die of the absolute paternal care
That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

21. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 128.

CHAPTER 5

Growth in Suffering

A Difficult and Enlightening Path

"The soul," he writes, "cannot enter these caverns or reach these treasures if, as we said, she does not first pass over to the divine wisdom through the straits of exterior and interior suffering."

22. Saint John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, rev. ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991), 616.

He describes access to these "caverns of Christ" . . .

23. Saint John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 616.

CHAPTER 6

Innocent Suffering

Seeking Balance in a Broken World

The report issued a year later from the State Attorney tried to address it with honesty and accuracy: “Unfortunately,” the report stated, “that question may never be answered conclusively.”

24. “Report of the State’s Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School [. . .],” November 25, 2013, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCJ/SandyHookFinalReportpdf.pdf>.

There is clearly a sense of just deserts at work here. But when it comes to suffering and sin, Ivan is unnerved by the proposal “that everything flows and finds its level,” and with the possibility that “all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony.”

25. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1996), 270–271.

At the consideration of satisfying some eternal harmony by means of even one such innocent child, he defiantly declares, “I don’t want harmony. From love for humanity I don’t want it.”

26. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 272.

And that I am doing. It’s not God that I don’t accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket.”

27. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 272.

“Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature . . . and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.”

28. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 272.

He reminds Ivan, “There is a being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him, and on Him is built the edifice.”

29. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 273.

CHAPTER 7

Light in the Darkness

Finding Love in an Unlikely Place

“Think nothing else but that God ordains all,” he wrote, “and where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love.”

30. Saint John of the Cross, “Letter 26,” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 760.

“In order to perceive the true answer to the ‘why’ of suffering,” insists Saint John Paul II, “we must look into the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of meaning of everything that exists.”

31. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 13.

The meaning of suffering, the Pope goes on to say, “always remains a mystery” . . .

32. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 13.

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” he cries.

33. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 50.

“So do I,” he says, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

34. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 50.

CHAPTER 8

Christ the Redeemer

Overcoming the Ultimate Suffering

Here we find the story of salvation, marvelously packed into one powerful statement. Saint John Paul II describes salvation as “liberation from evil” . . .

35. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 14.

Salvifici Doloris describes it as “*definitive suffering*” . . .

36. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 14.

CHAPTER 9
Gethsemane

Reclaiming the Garden

Vanhoye notes that sin “is always an act of egoism, in one form or another, which creates division and a lack of solidarity.”

37. Cardinal Albert Vanhoye, *Christ Our High Priest* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2010), 51.

He alone could “accept them *with that love for the Father which overcomes* the evil of every sin; in a certain sense he annihilates this evil in the spiritual space of the relationship between God and humanity, and fills this space with good.”

38. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 17. Italics in original.

Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams
Bridged over by our broken dreams;
Behind the misty caps of years,
Beyond the great salt font of tears,
The garden lies. Strive as you may,
You cannot miss it on your way.
All paths that have been or shall be,
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.

All those who journey, soon or late,
Must pass within the garden's gate;
Must kneel alone in darkness there,
And battle with some fierce despair.
God pity those who cannot say,
“Not mine but thine,” who only pray,

“Let this cup pass,” and cannot see
The purpose of Gethsemane.

39. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, “Gethsemane,” in *Poems of Ella Wheeler Wilcox* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, Hat and Mitchell, 1889), 168.

CHAPTER 10

Sign of the Cross

Suffering Redeemed

Three times it addresses him in the same words:
“Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling
completely to ruin.”

40. Thomas of Celano, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, trans. Placid Hermann
(Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 144.

Rood is my name; once, trembling, covered with blood,
I bore the great King.

41. “The Dream of the Rood,” in *The First Poems in English*, trans.
Michael Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 31.

“They made me a hoist for wrongdoers,” says the Rood,
and it is in this context that it encounters “mankind’s
brave King.”

42. “The Dream of the Rood,” 38.

They drove me through with dark nails:
on me are the deep wounds manifest,
wide-mouthed hate-dents.

I durst not harm any of them.
How they mocked at us both!
I was all moist with blood

sprung from the man's side
after He sent forth His soul.

43. "The Dream of the Rood," 39.

It signals that it is not alone in that sorrow, as "all creation wept."

44. "The Dream of the Rood," 39.

It has changed significantly from an instrument of torture to the "tree of glory."

45. "The Dream of the Rood," 40.

Having fully embraced its newfound identity, it declares openly to the dreamer, "The time has now come that men on earth, and all this marvelous creation, shall honor me far and wide and address themselves in prayer to this sign."

46. "The Dream of the Rood," 40.

In one of the more striking declarations of *Salvifici Doloris*, Saint John Paul II insists, "In the cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed."

47. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 19.

He has entered that "spiritual space" of the relationship between God and man in the most unseemly of moments.

48. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 17.

He went down into the night of our guilt, for only thus can it be transformed."

49. Pope Benedict XVI, “Holy Mass for the Imposition of the Sacred Pallium on Metropolitan Archbishops,” June 29, 2011, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110629_pallio.html.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing.”

50. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1009.

Cardinal Albert Vanhoye writes that Christ himself “did not need this suffering education,” but that it is something he willingly undergoes for our sake.

51. Vanhoye, *Christ Our High Priest*, 61.

“Christ,” he explains, “is able to communicate to us his profound docility to God.”

52. Vanhoye, *Christ Our High Priest*, 61.

But every soul on earth who intends to dwell with the Lord shall come to the Kingdom through the Rood.”

53. “The Dream of the Rood,” 41.

CHAPTER II

Eucharistic Suffering

Christ, the Good and Loving Pelican

Pie pellicane Iesu Domine
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine
Cuius una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.

54. Rev. Randy Soto, ed., *Manual of Prayers*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2021), 376.

A pitying pelican, dear Jesus, be;
Save by the blood thou sheddest on the tree,
My starving soul,—thy precious blood, whereof,
One drop from every crime the world can free.

55. Daniel Joseph Donahoe, *Early Christian Hymns: Translations of the Verses of the Most Notable Latin Writers of the Early and Middle Ages* (New York: Grafton Press, 1908), 189–190.

For it is his Body alone which heals and saves us, and
his Blood,
“whereof, One drop from every crime the world can free.”

56. Donahoe, *Early Christian Hymns*, 190.

PART II

How We Suffer

CHAPTER 12

The “Fortunate” One

The Path to Freedom

He has referred to this bitter reality as an “abhorrent plague” . . .

57. Pope Francis, “Angelus,” The Holy See, July 30, 2017. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2017/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20170730.html.

and an “open wound on the body of contemporary society.”

58. Pope Francis, “Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combatting Human Trafficking,” The Holy See, April 10, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/april/documents/papa-francesco_20140410_tratta-persone-umane.html.

This multi-billion dollar industry is growing at an alarming rate, and an astounding two-thirds of that business consists of sexual exploitation.

59. International Labor Organization, “2022 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery,” https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf.

The history of her life inspires not passive acceptance but the firm resolve to work to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights.”

60. “Homily of John Paul II” The Holy See, October 1, 2000, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20001001_canonization.html.

Suffering is always an experience of evil . . .

61. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 7.

On a societal level, she insisted that “for centuries the cult of suffering has been shamelessly exploited to justify injustice and oppression.”

62. Dorothy Söelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 103.

Instead, may we have the courage to touch the suffering flesh of Christ.”

63. Pope Francis, “World Day of Prayer for Peace,” The Holy See, January 1, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviiii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html.

Likewise, Saint Paul pleaded three times that the Lord remove his “thorn in the flesh,” . . .

64. Biblical commentaries speculate on what exactly this “thorn in the flesh” was for Paul, whether some physical ailment, psychological burden or perhaps even a struggle with a particular sin. For our purposes, it is clear enough that it was an affliction and he wanted it removed.

She would later comment, “Seeing the sun, moon and the stars, I said to myself: Who could be Master of these beautiful things? And I felt a great desire to see him, to know him, and to pay homage.”

65. “Josephine Bakhita (1869–1947),” The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20001001_giuseppina-bakhita_en.html.

“I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited by this love. And so my life is good.”

66. Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), no. 3.

CHAPTER 13

Proof for God

The Heartbeat of Hope

More specifically, she was thinking about her freshman literature class at Providence College and the opening line to *The Waste Land*: “April is the cruellest month.”

67. T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952), 37.

He argues, rather shockingly: *Quia malum est, Deus est. If there is evil, there is a God.*

68. *The Summa Contra Gentiles of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burnes, Oates and Washbourne, 1928), 177.

There would be no classification of good things if not for the supreme good who is God.

69. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 177.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that Christ, who consistently reaches out and touches those who are broken and hurting in the Gospels, continues to touch us in the sacraments in order to heal us.

70. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1504.

The Second Vatican Council teaches clearly that “the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal.”

71. The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, The Holy See, November 21, 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, no. 8.

CHAPTER 14

The Broken Road

A Way for the Church

“The Enemy kept his hold on my powers of willing,” he would later write, “and had made of it a chain for me, and bound me with it.”

72. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. and ed. Philip Burton (New York: Knopf, 2001), 168.

In his own words, he was a slave to lust, and until free he could not commit himself to baptism and the full renunciation of sin.

73. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, 130.

The saintly prelate had replied in the negative, insisting, “It is impossible that the son of these tears should perish.”

74. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, 61.

“Such was the sickness and torment that I knew,” he relates, “twisting and turning in my bonds until such a time as they should be broken utterly; for now they held me only by a thread.”

75. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, 180.

Reflecting on his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, he says, “In Christ, ‘every man becomes the way for the Church.’”

76. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 3.

Augustine was a “slave to lust” . . .

77. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, 130.

“The Church,” says Saint John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis*, “wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life.”

78. Saint John Paul II., *Redemptor Hominis*, The Holy See, March 4, 1979, no. 13, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html.

This man is the way for the Church—a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk—because man—every man without any

exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man—with each man without any exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it: ‘Christ, who died and was raised up for all, provides man’—each man and every man—‘with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling.’

79. Saint John Paul II., *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14.

One of the primary ways this happens is through the proclamation of the Gospel, the “explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord” and “the joyful, patient and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

80. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), no. 110.

Saint Josemaría Escrivá would often say, “Play the role of the prodigal son every day.”

81. Saint Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God* (Princeton, N.J.: Scepter, 1981), 340.

CHAPTER 15

Now I Begin

Finding the Courage to Persevere

Not being attentive to venial sins, she later recalled, nearly became her undoing.

82. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., vol. 1, *The Book of Her Life* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987), 67.

“But there was one thing that left me inconsolable,” she writes, “and that was that the Lord had called them only once, and they did not turn back and fall again; whereas in my case I had turned back so often that I was worn out from it.”

83. Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, 103.

“Though I continued to associate with the world,” she explains, “I had the courage to practice prayer. I say courage, for I do not know what would require greater courage among all the things there are in the world than to betray the king and know that he knows it and yet never leave His presence.”

84. Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, 95.

“I am not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I am not asking you to do anything more than look at Him. For who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord, even if you do so just for a moment if you can't do more? You can look at very ugly things; won't you be able to look at the most beautiful thing imaginable? Well now, daughters, your Spouse never takes His eyes off you.”

85. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., vol. 2, *The Way of Perfection* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980), 133–134.

He says that it is precisely through this service to the suffering soul that the Church becomes “supremely aware” of the inner reality of the human person, “what is deepest and most essential in man, *because it is spiritual and*

incorruptible.”

86. Saint John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1986), no. 58.

“Suffering cannot be *transformed* and changed by the grace from outside, but *from within*. And Christ through His own salvific suffering is very much present in every human suffering, and can act from within that suffering by the powers of His Spirit of truth, His consoling Spirit.”

87. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

In that offering of oneself to God and others, he or she discovers more completely the great dignity belonging to the children of God and even the hope of future glory.

88. Saint John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 59.

The Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* succinctly states one of the foundational dimensions of the human person: that “man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

89. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Holy See, December 7, 1965, no. 24, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “we pray as we live, because we live as we pray.”

90. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2725.

“I recount this also,” writes Saint Teresa, “that one may understand how if the soul perseveres in prayer, in the

midst of the sins, temptations and failures of a thousand kinds that the devil places in its path, in the end, I hold as certain, the Lord will draw it forth to the harbor of salvation as—now it seems—He did for me. May it please His Majesty that I do not get lost again.”

91. Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, 95–96.

CHAPTER 16

Presence and Participation

God Working in and Through Our Suffering

One evening, he heard the Lord say to him, “Behold, thy ship is ready.”

92. Sir Samuel Ferguson, *The Remains of St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland, The Confessio and Epistle to Coroticus* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers and Walker, 1888), 21.

About a quarter million persons are refugees, people who have fled their own country and are seeking refuge in a foreign land, where they have no citizenship, no resources, and very little hope. Millions of others are trafficked, collateral damage in the world of conflict and war.

93. See The UN Refugee Agency, “Global Report 2021,” <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalreport2021/pdf>.

This must be, in the words of Saint John Paul II, the “way of the Church”

94. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 3.

The believer also shares, in the same way, in his redemptive suffering.

95. See Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 19.

Secondly, we can now discover this redemptive suffering in our own lives, through faith. In faith we come to recognize the sufferings of Christ in our own personal experience.

96. See Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 20.

The New Testament expresses this concept in many places, and the focus is always on the resurrected Christ; it is the light of the resurrection shining on the darkness of suffering.

97. See Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 20.

Several years after his return to Britain, Patrick heard another voice. This time it was not the voice of God, but the “voices of the Irish.”

98. Ferguson, *The Remains of St. Patrick*, 24.

He heard these words deep within his soul: “Come, holy youth, and walk amongst us.”

99. Ferguson, *The Remains of St. Patrick*, 24.

CHAPTER 17

The Patience of God

Perseverance in the Face of Evil

“It is a sin! God does not want this!”

100. Godfrey Poage, *St. Maria Goretti: In Garments All Red* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Tan Books, 1998), 37.

At one point, when asked about Alessandro, she replied, “For the love of Jesus I too pardon him, and I want him to be with me in heaven.”

101. Godfrey Poage, *St. Maria Goretti*, 47.

Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question: the goodness of creation, the drama of sin, and the patient love of God who comes to meet man by his covenants, the redemptive Incarnation of his Son, the gift of the Spirit, his gathering of the Church, the power of the sacraments, and his call to a blessed life to which free creatures are invited to consent in advance, but from which, by a terrible mystery, they can also turn away in advance.

102. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 309.

“There is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil.”

103. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 309.

Both Assunta *and* Alessandro were present.

104. Glynn MacNiven-Johnston, *Maria Goretti: Teenage Martyr* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1997), 31.

The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.”

105. “Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI,” The Holy See, April 24, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html

CHAPTER 18

Encounter with the Living God

Sharing in the Suffering of Christ

Saint John Paul II returns to the point made earlier, about how the world's Redemption was brought about through Christ's sufferings, which have now become a superabundant resource to all who suffer.

106. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 24.

That love which annihilates evil and creates good is not something Christ clings to but a good he shares freely with all who are able to embrace it.

107. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 17.

It highlights that family members who are present to comfort and strengthen the sick should also encourage and assist them as they “contribute to the well-being of the people of God by associating themselves willingly with Christ's passion and death.”

108. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), 30.

While it is true that the Church recognizes a special value in suffering as a good that participates in the very work of Christ's redemption, this is not a perspective the suffering person acquires automatically.

109. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 24.

When Saint John Paul II first introduces the theme of redemptive suffering, citing Saint Paul's joy at this discovery in his own life, he quickly qualifies it by relating how this meaning of suffering is found "at the end of the long road."

110. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 1.

We must first experience the Risen Christ, says Saint John Paul II, and find the "salvific light" of his cross shining on the darkness of our own suffering before we can begin to see the redemptive meaning of human suffering.

111. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 21.

CHAPTER 19

Suffering for Christ

The Cross of Martyrdom

In *Salvifici Doloris*, Saint John Paul II describes what he calls a "Gospel of Suffering" that has been given to the Church through the death and resurrection of Christ.

112. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, nos. 25–26.

This Gospel of Suffering, writes Saint John Paul II, "contains in itself *a special call to courage and fortitude*, sustained by the eloquence of the resurrection."

113. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 25.

Yet the Gospel of Suffering continues to be written.

114. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

Father Tom, an Indian priest who celebrated daily Mass for them, would often say that they should be prepared for martyrdom.

115. Francesca Pollio Fenton, “6 Years Ago These Religious Sisters Died in Yemen,” National Catholic Register, March 7, 2022, <https://www.ncregister.com/cna/6-years-ago-these-religious-sisters-died-in-yemen>.

She said, “Because of their faithfulness, they were in the *right* place at the *right* time and were ready when the Bridegroom came.”

116. Joan Frawley Desmond, “Eyewitness Account of ISIS Attack on Mother Teresa’s Sisters in Yemen,” National Catholic Register, March 17, 2016, <https://www.ncregister.com/newseyewitness-account-of-isis-attack-on-mother-teresas-sisters-in-yemen>.

CHAPTER 20

Suffering with Christ

Listening for God’s Voice

Far from becoming bitter about that ironic reality, he would later say, “The Father did not abandon me.”

117. Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, *Testimony of Hope: The Spiritual Exercises of John Paul II*, trans. Julia Mary Darrenkamp, FSP, and Anne Eileen Heffernan, FSP (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2000), 88.

At first, the leaders determined to change the groups completely every two weeks, fearing the guards would become “‘contaminated’ by this dangerous bishop.”

118. Nguyen Van Thuan, *Testimony of Hope*, 72.

Van Thuan said to himself, “You have the love of Christ in your heart; love them as Jesus loved you.”

119. Nguyen Van Thuan, *Testimony of Hope*, 72.

The leaders then told the guards, “We’ve decided not to switch you anymore; otherwise this bishop will contaminate all of the police.”

120. Nguyen Van Thuan, *Testimony of Hope*, 72.

The second “chapter” in the Gospel of Suffering “is written by all those *who suffer together with Christ*, uniting their human sufferings to His salvific suffering.”

121. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

Saint John Paul II explains how it is almost always the case that the suffering person begins with “a *typically human protest* and *with the question of ‘why’*.”

122. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

Conversion, writes Saint John Paul II, often happens over a long period of time, and we should not expect to arrive quickly at the place where our suffering is redemptive and a fruitful sharing in the cross of Christ.

123. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

CHAPTER 2 I

Set Free

The Descending Meaning of Suffering

“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. He does not discover this meaning at his own human level, but at the level of the suffering of Christ. At the same time, however, from this level of Christ the salvific meaning of suffering *descends to man’s level* and becomes, in a sense, the individual’s personal response. It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spiritual joy.”

124. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 26.

He explains how we participate in that work of unbinding those around us through our cooperation with God: “To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds: ‘The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable’.

125. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 178.

Pope Francis explains Matthew’s Last Judgment, and similar passages, by stating, “What these passages make

clear is the absolute priority of ‘going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters.’”

126. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 179.

As he describes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.”

127. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 186.

“In the messianic program of Christ,” writes Saint John Paul II, “which is at the same time the program *of the kingdom of God*, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love toward neighbor, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a ‘civilization of love.’”

128. Saint John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 30.