

WHY IS THERE SUFFERING?...

Translated from the Catechesis No. 0 "From zero to the Eucharist ..." on how to go gradually to the Party without end!
Cathedral of Noto – Saturday 7th December 2013 / 20.30-21-30

We will read and try to explain some passages of the

- **Word of God (OT, NT)**
- **Teaching of the Catholic Church (from the Fathers to Now)**
- **Experiences...**

(INTRODUCTION: Example about observing the rules of the road ...).



Word of God

OLD TESTAMENT

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF MAN'S REBELLION AGAINST THE DESIGN OF GOD

- ✓ *"To the woman he [God] said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it, Cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3:16-19).*

GOD SEES AND INTERVENES IN HIS PEOPLE'S SUFFERING

- ✓ *"The LORD said: I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now indeed the outcry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them." (Ex 3:7-9).*

SUFFERING BRINGS TO PRAYER, WHICH LEADS TO FREEDOM

- ✓ *"He humbled their hearts through hardship; they stumbled with no one to help. In their distress they cried to the LORD, who saved them in their peril; He brought them forth from darkness and the shadow of death and broke their chains asunder... Some fell sick from their wicked ways, afflicted because of their sins. They loathed all manner of food; they were at the gates of death. In their distress they cried to the LORD, who saved them in their peril,.. They reeled, staggered like drunkards; their skill was of no avail. In their distress they cried to the LORD, who brought them out of their peril." (Ps 107:12-14, 17-19, 27-28).*
- ✓ *"The upright saw this and rejoiced; all wickedness shut its mouth. Whoever is wise will take note of these things, and ponder the merciful deeds of the LORD." > (Ps 107:42-43).*

- ✓ *"LORD, oppressed by your punishment, we cried out in anguish under your discipline. As a woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in pain, so were we before you, LORD." (Is 26:16-17).*

SUFFERING AS CORRECTION SO THAT PEOPLE MAY CONVERT AND BELIEVE

- ✓ *"Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them, and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, Lord!" (Wis 12:2).*

- ✓ *“Now I urge those who read this book not to be disheartened by these misfortunes, but to consider that these punishments were meant not for the ruin but for the correction of our nation.” (2Mac 6:12).*

WHY ARE THERE PEOPLE WHO SEARCH FOR THE GOOD THROUGH TRIALS, WHILE THE WICKED PROSPER?

- ✓ *“Your words are too much for me, says the LORD. You ask, ‘What have we spoken against you?’ You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what do we gain by observing God’s requirements, and by going about as mourners before the Lord [...]?’ But we call the arrogant blessed; for evildoers not only prosper but even test God and escape.’ Then those who fear the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord listened attentively; [...] They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my own special possession, on the day when I take action. And I will have compassion on them [...] Then you will again distinguish between the just and the wicked, between the person who serves God, and the one who does not. For the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts. But for you who fear my name, the sun of justice will arise with healing in its wings; And you will go out leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal 3:13-20).*
- ✓ *“[The wicked] are free of the burdens of life; they are not afflicted like others...[but then] I entered the sanctuary of God and came to understand their end.” (cf. Ps 73:5, 17)*

REASONS FOR, AND FORESHADOWINGS OF, THE REDEMPITIVE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

- ✓ *“God forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin; but does not leave it without punishment” (cf. Ex 34:7).*
- ✓ *“He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. [...] My servant, the just one, shall justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear.” (Is 53:5, 11).*

NEW TESTAMENT

THE JOY AND THE GLORY OF PARADISE WILL INFINITELY SURPASS THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT LIFE

- ✓ *Jesus says: “When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish.” (John 16:21-22).*
- ✓ *“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.” (Rom 8:18)*

IN CHRIST, WE CAN PARTICIPATE IN HIS REDEMPITIVE SUFFERINGS

- ✓ *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” (Col 1:24)*
- ✓ *“For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” (1Pet 2:19-21 (RSVCE))*

WE SHOULD REJOICE IN THE SUFFERINGS SUFFERED FOR CHRIST, IN VIEW OF THE ETERNAL GLORY TO COME

- ✓ *“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mt 5:11-12).*

“Beloved, do not be surprised that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” (1Pt 4:12-14).

Teachings of the Catholic Church

PATRISTIC AGE

FOLLOW CHRIST THROUGH SUFFERINGS IN ORDER TO ATTAIN TO THE RESURRECTION

- ✓ --- **St. Ignatius of Antioch** (Bishop and Martyr; † 107): *“My only desire is that I may find my way to God through suffering and so, at the resurrection, prove to be your disciple”.*
(S. IGNAZIO DI ANTIOCHIA, *Uff. d. Lett.*, Sab. XVII° sett. T. O., unpublished translation by pfs gm)
- ✓ *“Unless we are ready through his power to die in the likeness of his passion, his life is not in us.”*
(St. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Office of Read.*, XVI Sunday O.T.)
- ✓ --- **St. Policarp of Smyrna** (Bishop and Martyr; 69 - † 155): *“Let us then imitate his constancy; if we should suffer because of his name, let us give him that glory. For this is the personal example he has given us.”* (St. POLYCARP OF SMYRNA, *Office of Read.*, Tuesday XXVI Week O.T.).

THE VISION OF A VERY BEAUTIFUL GARDEN STRENGTHENED St. Perpetua and her companions to face martyrdom

- ✓ --- About **St. Perpetua, Felicity, Saturus, Saturninus, Revocatus and Secundulus** (Martyrs; † 203): Saturninus had a vision in a dream before his martyrdom in which he saw that he and Perpetua had already left their mortal bodies, and he said to Perpetua: *“Here is what the Lord promised us.”.. Then they entered a very beautiful garden.. and the elders of the garden told them: “Go and have fun!”.* (cf. *Atti dei Martiri*, I, Città del Vaticano, ristampa 1962, pp. 14-57, unpublished translation by pfs gm).

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST RATHER THAN DESIRING WORLDLY JOYS

- ✓ --- **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** (Bishop and Doctor of the Church; 330 - †389/390): *“Let us be ready to suffer with and for Christ rather than desiring the world’s cheerful fellowship”.*
(S. GREGORIO DI NAZIANZO, *Uff. d. Lett.*, Sab. 5° sett. di Quaresima, unpublished translation by pfs gm)

VARIOUS SUFFERINGS BROUGHT St. Augustine to conversion

- ✓ --- **St. Augustine of Hippo** (Bishop and Doctor of the Church; 354 - † 430): *“I found myself broken into pieces, when I wandered from You...and drifted into nothing.. In my youth I burned with the desire to be satiated with things below.. and I became to myself a land of misery.”* (cf. St. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Confessions*, Book II, 2, 2-4; 10, 18).

NOT ALL SUFFERINGS MAKE ONE BLESSED

- ✓ --- **St. Leo the Great** (Pope from 440 to † 461 and Doctor of the Church): *“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”[cf. Matt 5:4]. But the mourning for which he promises eternal consolation, dearly beloved, has nothing to do with ordinary worldly distress; for the tears which have their origin in the sorrow common to all mankind do not make anyone blessed. There is another cause for the sighs of the saints, another reason for their blessed tears. Religious grief mourns for sin, one’s own or another’s; it does not lament because of what happens as a result of God’s justice, but because of what is done by human malice”.*
(St. LEO THE GREAT, *Sermon on the beatitudes*, in: *Office of Read.*, Saturday, XXII Week O.T.)

MIDDLE AGES

JOY IN THE SUFFERINGS THAT LEAD TO PERFECTION

- ✓ --- **St. Peter Damian** (Bishop and Doctor of the Church; 1007 - † 1072): *“By hammering gold, the smith beats out the dross [...] the sculptor files metal to reveal a shining vein underneath. The potter’s furnace puts vessels to the test. And the fire of suffering tests the spirit of just men. [cf. Sir 27:5 in the Vulgate]... Therefore, my brother, scorned as you are by men, lashed as it were by God, do not despair. [...] Let the serenity of your spirit shine through your face. Let the joy of your mind burst forth. Let words of thanks break from your lips.”* (St. PETER DAMIAN, *Office of Read.*, 21 February).

SUFFERING PUSHED St. Francis to search for the will of God

- ✓ --- ABOUT **St. Francis of Assisi** (Founder of the Friars Minors; 1182 - † 1226): *“Francis [...] endured great mental anguish and could find no rest for he was searching how he could put into practice*

what was in his heart." (LEONE - RUFINO - ANGELO, *Legend of the Three Companions*, n. 12, in: *St. Francis of Assisi. Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, II, edited by M. A. Habig, St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati [OH] 2008, pp. 893-901 (Abbreviated from here on as F.S.), pp. 901-902).

THE SUFFERING WHICH ENTERED INTO THE WILL OF GOD WAS SWEET AND WELCOME TO ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

- ✓ *"Meanwhile, as his infirmity increased, all his bodily strength failed and, destitute of all his powers, he could not move himself at all. Still when he was asked by a certain brother what he could prefer to bear, this lingering and long illness or the suffering of a severe martyrdom at the hands of an executioner, he replied: 'My son, that has always been still is most dear to me and more sweet and more acceptable which please the Lord my God most to let happen in me and with me, for I desire always only to be found conformed and obedient to his will in all things. Yet, this infirmity is harder for me to bear even for three days than any martyrdom. I am not speaking of the reward, but only of the intensity of suffering it causes.' O martyr and martyr, who smiling and rejoicing most willingly put up with what was most bitter and most difficult to bear! In all truth, not a single member in him remained free of the greatest suffering and, as the natural warmth was gradually lost, he approached nearer to the end each day. The doctors were amazed, the brothers astonished, that his soul could live in flesh so dead, for, the flesh having been consumed, nothing but skin clung to his bones."*

(THOMAS OF CELANO, *The First Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, in: F.S. 107, pp. 320-321)

INSOFAR AS WE ARE MEMBERS OF CHRIST, SUFFERING LEADS US TO IMMORTAL GLORY

- ✓ --- **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS** (Priest and Doctor of the Church; 1225 - † 1274): *"As Christ.. through the Passion attained to the glory of immortality, likewise, we who are His members are freed by the Passion.. which ensures us the inheritance of immortal glory"*.

(St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Part. III, q. 49, art. 3)

THOSE WHO KNOW HOW TO SUFFER BETTER, WILL HAVE GREATER PEACE

- ✓ --- **AUTHOR OF THE "IMITATION OF CHRIST"** (XIV-XVth century): *"Those who can best suffer will enjoy the most peace, for such persons are masters of themselves, lords of the world, with Christ for their friend, and heaven as their reward."* (*The Imitation of Christ. In four books by Thomas À Kempis*, Book II, Ch. 3, Edited by C. L. Fitzpatrick, Catholic Book Publishing Corp., [N.J.], 1977, pp. 73).

MODERN AGE

WHOEVER FOLLOWS THE KING OF KINGS IN SUFFERINGS, WILL FOLLOW HIM ALSO IN GLORY

- ✓ --- **ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA** (Priest and Founder of the Society of Jesus; 1491 - † 1556): *"Whoever wishes to join me... must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory."*

(IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 95, translated by L. J. Puhl, Loyola Press, Chicago [IL] 2019)

COMMUNICATING THE SUFFERING OF ANXIETY TO ONE'S SPIRITUAL GUIDE IS THE BEST OF REMEDIES

- ✓ --- **ST. FRANCIS DE SALES** (Bishop and Doctor of the Church; 1567 - † 1622): *"If you can lay your anxiety before your spiritual guide, [...] you can be sure that you will find great solace. The heart find relief in telling its troubles to another, [...] it is the best of remedies [against anxiety]."* (St. FRANCIS DE SALES, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part IV, Chap. XI, Ignatius Press-Augustine Institute, San Francisco-Greenwood Village [CO] 2015, pp. 173-174).

- ✓ *"Consider how insupportable the pains of hell will be by reason of their eternal duration. If the irritating bite of an insect, or the restlessness of fever, makes an ordinary night seem so long and tedious, how terrible will the endless night of eternity be, where nothing will be found save despair, blasphemy and fury!"*

(St. FRANCIS DE SALES, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, Chapter XV, 7th Meditation, Ignatius Press-Augustine Institute, San Francisco-Greenwood Village [CO] 2015, pp. 24)

IF YOU ARE GOLD, SUFFERING PURIFIES YOU; IF YOU ARE A STEEL, SUFFERING REMOVES THE RUST

- ✓ --- **ST. JOSEPH OF CUPERTINO** (Priest; 1603 - † 1663): *“To suffer for love of God is a very singular grace that the Lord only grants to those whom he loves. You are either gold or steel: if you are gold, the suffering purifies you; if you are steel, the suffering removes the rust.”*
(S. GIUSEPPE DA COPERTINO, *Uff. d. Lett.*, 18 Settembre T.O., unpublished translation by pfgsm)

POSTMODERN AGE (CONTEMPORARY)

JESUS ALSO SAVES SOULS THROUGH THE SUFFERING OF HIS DISCIPLES

- ✓ --- **ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX** (Virgin and Doctor of the Church; 1873 - † 1897): *“Jesus made me understand that he wanted to give me souls by means of the cross.”*
(S. TERESINA DI LISIEUX, *Storia di un anima*, Città Nuova, Roma 1997, p. 159, unpublished translation by pfgsm)
- ✓ --- **ST. PIO OF PIETRELCINA** (Priest; 1887 - † 1968): *“I don’t love suffering in itself; I ask GOD for it, I yearn it, because of the fruits that it gives me: it gives glory to God, it saves my brothers from this exile, it frees souls from the fire of purgatory – and what more do I want? – Father, what is suffering? – Answer: Expiation. And what is it for you? – My daily bread, my delight!”*
(St. PIO OF PIETRELCINA, *Letters of Padre Pio*, 167)

TRIALS ARE GEMS FOR THE SOUL

- ✓ *“The trials to which the Lord subjects you and will subject you are all marks of divine love and gems for the soul. The winter will pass and the unending spring will come; the harsher the storms were, the richer the beauty will be!”*
(S. PIO DA PIETRELCINA, *Consigli Esortazioni*, Ed. Casa sollievo della sofferenza, San Giovanni Rotondo 1956, unpublished translation by pfgsm)

GOD SANCTIFIES US BY MEANS OF THE CROSS

- ✓ *“We don’t want to accept the fact that suffering is necessary for our soul, [...] to purify it and detach it from created things. We don’t want to understand that God does not wish to – and cannot – save or sanctify us without the cross, and the more He draws a soul to Himself, the more He purifies it by means of the cross.”* (St. PIO OF PIETRELCINA, FSP, n. 23).

CHRIST SHEDS LIGHT ON THE ENIGMA OF PAIN AND OF DEATH

- ✓ --- **VATICAN COUNCIL II** (1962 - 1965): *“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light [...] Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father.”* (VATICAN COUNCIL II, Past. Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December, 1965, n. 22).

THE WORD OF GOD ILLUMINATES THE JOURNEY OF SUFFERING MAN

- ✓ --- **ST. JOHN PAUL II** (Pope from 1978 to † 2005): *“Declaring the power of salvific suffering, the Apostle Paul says: ‘In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church’. These words seem to be found at the end of the long road that winds through the suffering which forms part of the history of man and which is illuminated by the Word of God.”* (St. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 11 February 1984, n. 1; cf. Mag. 101,1).

IN SUFFERING IS HIDDEN A GRACE WHICH DRAWS A PERSON INTERIORLY CLOSER TO CHRIST

- ✓ *“Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly closer to Christ, a special grace. To this grace many saints, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint 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 they become a completely new person. They discover a new dimension, as it were, of their entire life and vocation.”* (St. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 26).

IN THE TEMPTATIONS CAUSED BY SUFFERING LET US TURN TOWARD THE WITNESSES OF FAITH

- ✓ --- **CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH** (1992): *“Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death [...] can shake our faith and become a temptation against it. It is then when we must turn to the witnesses of faith [like the martyrs, for example]”* (CCC, 164-165).

THE CAPACITY TO ACCEPT TRIALS IN ORDER TO MATURE, HEALS A PERSON

- ✓ --- **BENEDICT XVI** (Pope from 2005 to 2013): *“It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love.”*
(BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 30 November 2007, n. 37)

SUFFERING CAN BE A TIME OF GROWTH IN FAITH AND LOVE

- ✓ --- **POPE FRANCIS** (Pope from 2013): *“Christians know that suffering cannot be eliminated, yet it can have meaning and become an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God who does not abandon us; in this way it can serve as a moment of growth in faith and love.”*
(FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013, n. 56)

Experiences

A MOTHER LOST HER SON, BUT FOUND THE FAITH WHICH WILL RETURN HIM TO HER FOREVER

- ✓ (Cfr. FRA VOLANTINO VERDE, pro manuscripto, *“Sacro” Libretto Sanitario*, 2003 ca, p. 16-17).

ANSWER TO A TAXI DRIVER WHO WOULD NOT ACCEPT VOLUNTARY SUFFERING OR THE PENANCE OF CONSECRATED PEOPLE

- ✓ When a taxi driver would not accept the idea of voluntary suffering or the penance of consecrated religious, a friar responded: *“If you saw a tiny child about to fall into a canyon, and the canyon was surrounded by barbed wire, what would you do? Would you scrape up the skin of your arm (etc.) to grab him from the other side of the barbed wire and so help him out and save him? Or would you just let him fall in like he was no more than a stone? Reflect on this, because this is what Jesus did for us, to prevent us from “falling down” forever.*
(Cf. FRIAR VOLANTINO VERDE, manuscript, *“Sacro” Libretto di Circolazione²*, p. 367)

A MAN MISSED HIS SHIP AT THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR AND WAS ANGRY WITH GOD. BUT THEN...

- ✓ (cf. PFSGM, *work in progress*).

STORIES

THE SMITH AND THE SWORD...

- ✓ (Work in progress).

SOMEONE SAID: “PLEASE, GOD...DO SOMETHING!!”...

- ✓ *“A holy man was passing through the city when he happened upon a little girl with torn clothes who was asking for alms. He turned his thoughts to the Lord: “God, how could You permit something like this to happen? Please, do something.” In the evening, he saw scenes of death on the news – the eyes of dying children and torn bodies. Again, he prayed: “Lord, what misery! Do something!” That night, the Lord clearly told him: “I have already done something: I made you!”*

IN CONCLUSION:

THE STORY OF THE BAMBOO REED

- ✓ (work in progress).

➔ For further exploration of these topics, cf. *“Sacred” Health Booklet (from cover to cover)*

(Cf. FRIAR VOLANTINO VERDE, manuscript, *“Sacro” Libretto Sanitario*, ca. 2003)

A SHORT SUMMARY:

✓ Suffering is always useful for two things:

SUFFERING IS ALWAYS USEFUL FOR 2 THINGS

[Except in the case of Christ (cf. Is 53:4-12; 1Pet 2:22) and Mary]

1°) FOR THOSE IN ATHEISM, IT PUSHES THEM TOWARDS FAITH (OR MORE FAITH)

E.g. (*Ex 34:7; Ps 107; Wis 12:2; Mark 9:17, 13-24; John 9:35-39; Rom 10:11; John 11:45; 1Pet2:7-8; 1John5:5; ...*)

2°) FOR THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH, IT PUSHES THEM TOWARDS HOLINESS !..

E.g. (*Job 36:5-11; Matt 5:10-13; 1Pet 4:12-19; 1Pet 2:19,21; 1Pet 1:6-8; 1Pt 5:10-11; 1Pet1:15; ...*)



"In Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death!..."

(cf Concilio Vaticano II°, Cost. Past. *Gaudium et Spes*, n° 22)

Divine Providence is always hidden behind painful suffering... just as the luminous Resurrection is hidden behind the Cross of Jesus!....

(cf. 2Tim 2:11-12; Rom 8:18)