

August 30, 2026—22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

A life without suffering is not an option! Suffering has been part of the human condition ever since the fall of Adam. We sometimes pretend that it is possible to avoid it and then get mad at God when the trials come. The prophet Jeremiah is a perfect example of this attitude. Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet, but the message he had to deliver to Israel caused him much suffering. If they surrendered to the Babylonian army which was approaching, they would be saved from the worst of being conquered. They didn't want to hear it. Jeremiah regretted his prophetic call from God, writing: **"You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped. All day long I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me."** More than that, Jeremiah was rejected, persecuted and arrested because he spoke the message of the Lord.

Jeremiah was an Old Testament figure who foreshadowed the suffering Jesus. Jesus too was rejected, persecuted and arrested, but also tortured and put to death for our salvation. Jesus didn't come into our world just to be a good teacher; He came to be a Savior. He came to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice of Love for the redemption of the world.

This Sunday's Gospel is part two. Last Sunday, we heard part one with Peter professing His faith in Jesus as the **"Christ, the Son of the living God"**. Following the example of the Kingdom of David in the Old Testament, Jesus appointed Peter the chief steward in His Kingdom, the Church. Jesus named Peter as the visible head of the Church; an office that would be passed on from one successor to the next until the end of time. It was a supreme moment of honor for Peter. However, Peter still needed to learn the full meaning of the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church.

That understanding came, at least partially, in what happened next. The Gospel told us Jesus predicted His upcoming suffering, death and resurrection to prepare them. Peter riding high from his appointment thought that he could correct Jesus! These sufferings cannot happen; Peter would stop it. Jesus turned to him and called the newly appointed head of the Church, Satan, **"Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as man does."**

Jesus did not come to live a life of ease and comfort and earthly honor; He came to bear the Cross and save the world. Peter did not understand yet, but he would! One day, he would be nailed to his own cross, crucified upside down in Rome. The sufferings of the cross were not an option for Jesus, nor Peter, nor for us.

Jesus continued, “**Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.**” We Catholics use the phrase “**offer it up**”, meaning that if you unite your suffering to Christ crucified He will give it redemptive power and help you to bear it. Suffering has value and purpose in the Catholic way of thinking.

Father Benedict Groeschel used to say that most people are willing to bear a cross if it is made of Styrofoam with a little wheel on the bottom. As we learn in life, sometimes even the smallest sufferings can feel like a heavy weight. We cannot learn the meaning of suffering without prayer and without understanding the meaning of the Cross. Prayer allows us to develop a relationship with God and to learn to think as He does.

If I only pray when it suites me or when the trials and sufferings come, I must ask myself if I do have a real friendship with God? We can see God like a soda machine; you put your money in, and the soda drops out; we put in our prayer and expect God to produce the results we want. When He doesn’t, we get mad at Him claiming He really doesn’t care! Why believe in God who can’t or won’t help me?

Prayer that brings about a real relationship, helps us deal with our sufferings. In prayer we talk to God about them and open our hearts to His will; we say, “**Thy will be done**” often enough. Conversation with God, allows us to listen to Him; He softens our hearts and gives us the grace to trust in Him, even when we don’t see an immediate answer. I often think of St. Monica who prayed for her son, Augustine’s conversion for 17 years without ceasing. She persevered and God answered her in a mighty way. Augustine did convert to the Catholic faith; ordained priest and bishop, became one of the greatest theologians in Christian history and a saint. (They are pictured in the first painting in our sanctuary.) Like any human relationship, our relationship with God takes time to develop and must keep growing. If it doesn’t grow, it doesn’t stay the same, it becomes weaker.

Peter would eventually learn the lesson that he didn’t understand that day; for three years he was in contact with Jesus on a day-to-day basis, which is prayer at its best. However, he truly learned it through the Cross on Good Friday. It is not an easy lesson to learn, but suffering does produce virtue; we cannot grow in holiness; we cannot grow in faith, trust, love, courage, patience or any other virtue without it. Our own suffering also makes us compassionate to the sufferings of others.

Prayer which develops a friendship with God, with Jesus the Suffering Servant, is necessary to develop an understanding of the meaning of human suffering. We

need to learn to pray with the heart: we need quiet to pray, we need commitment to pray, we need the Holy Spirit to pray. We will continue next week to reflect on the meaning of prayer.