

The Purpose and Meaning of Suffering:

A Discussion-Based Course for Health Care Professionals

Based on the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II

ON THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF HUMAN SUFFERING

(SALVIFICI DOLORIS)

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How to Use This Course

Why a Course for Physicians and Nurses about Suffering? (Because they need it)

This discussion-based course was written for Catholic physicians, nurses, and other health-care professionals to

- 1) Instill a Catholic vision of the purpose and meaning of suffering,
- 2) Learn how to practically provide compassion to our suffering patients, and
- 3) Provide time for fellowship with others who want the Catholic Faith to inform and influence their professional lives in medicine

Why Can't I Just Learn This on My Own? (You can, but . . .)

This course will comprehensively take the participant through the 31 paragraphs and over 16,000 words of *Salvifici Doloris* (the Latin title of the document; "SD" for short) in twelve interactive lessons. This course was written to be given in a group setting because

- 1) It gives people the opportunity to learn from others (many of the practical suggestions will come from your colleagues, not the pages of this manual)
- 2) It helps people to be more attentive and more responsible while learning
- 3) In today's Catholic, there is a great need for fellowship among like-minded Catholic medical professionals
- 4) As with the meaning of suffering, we learn the meaning of our lives serving patients primarily through experience and not through head knowledge

How Does a "Discussion-Based" Course Work? (Very well, Thank you!)

This course is *not* a didactic course with a teacher lecturing and showing powerpoint slides. As you will see from the structure of each lesson, there is *no* lecturing, and the essential content of each lesson will be read aloud in a shared fashion by all participants. This allows for a maximum of focused discussion based on a maximum of shared background material in a finite amount of time.

Each lesson possesses the following sections, and each serves a particular purpose:

OPENING PRAYER

I recommend that you invoke the Patron Saint of your local Guild. This will help unite you more personally to him or her and gain you grace to participate well in this course. If you have no Patron Saint, you can start with a prayer to Our Lady, such as the *Memorare*, or you can invoke the Holy Spirit (“Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful . . .”).

SESSION GOALS

Too often, we go into reading or learning without the need to answer a specific question. If we do seek the answer to a question, we are more likely to remember what we learned. Three goals are chosen per session in honor of the Holy Trinity. Reflect on these goals before and after each session.

GOSPEL REFLECTION and QUESTION

A Gospel passage is chosen that incorporates one or more of the themes from the section of SD to be covered in that lesson. In this way, we “prime the pump” of our minds to look at a subject from the perspective of Christ instead of the perspective of the world.

And yes, you really do have to spend FIVE WHOLE MINUTES reflecting on it in silence before discussing it. For those not accustomed to silence, this will be incredibly painful, but it is the “good pain” an athlete encounters as his body is honed to perform actions it could not do before. This silence will hone our spirits to hear God speak to us in the “still, small voice” of our souls.

This action will also prepare people to follow Pope Benedict XVI’s call for a return to the ancient prayer form of *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading) (*Verbum Domini* 87). This ancient and incredibly fruitful form of prayer contains the following steps

- 1 - *Lectio* (Reading a text of scripture to see what it says *in itself*.)
- 2 - *Meditatio* (Meditation on a text of scripture to see what it says *to us*.)
- 3 - *Oratio* (In prayer, we speak to the Lord in response to his word.)
- 4 - *Contemplatio* (We silently contemplate reality as God sees it and ask what conversion of mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of us?)
- 5 - *Actio* (Because of what we have received in prayer, we act in our lives to give ourselves to others in charity.)

Listening to the Gospel and reflecting in silence will enable us to perform steps 1 and 2. By answering the Gospel Reflection Question and all the Discussion Questions, we begin to fulfill steps 3 and 4. By fulfilling the commitment in each week’s *Make it Your Own* section, we achieve step 5.

SALVIFICI DOLORIS

The entire original document is contained within the pages of this course. The Pope's letter is broken into sections based on the 1/12 of the document to be covered in each lesson. This part of each lesson is printed in smaller font, since it will not be read during group settings. *However*, since all will benefit from hearing the Pope's words, a section directly from the document (in regular size font instead of small font) will be read aloud before starting the **Summary and Explication**.

This section comprises the "pre-work" to be done before each meeting. It is not essential to read this before meeting, but it will make each session more fruitful, since reading John Paul will not only raise questions in your mind but also give you insights that are unexpected. The course is written so that **no remote preparation is necessary** to benefit from the meetings.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF SALVIFICI DOLORIS

This is the meat of the course; what preceded were appetizers and salad. A *summary* covers the main points of a longer document. An *explication* analyzes and develops an idea or principle. In this section, Pope John Paul's main points are put into language that might be easier for the average non-theologian health care professional to understand. These ideas are also embellished with stories, quotes, and explanations that hopefully will bring them home.

The **Discussion Questions** are embedded within this section. After reading a series of paragraphs, the group stops at each question and discusses it. Questions are of two types: One type is based on the past - what has the participant experienced or observed. The other type is future focused - how can we apply what we have learned to future situations. The questions do not involve repeating points of the Catechism (as important as those are). This is where you will learn many practical tips from your colleagues.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

In this section, we commit to action and accountability. We commit to action because so many courses become simply a form of mental massage that may make us feel good but really doesn't change our lives. We commit to accountability, because after the first lesson, there will always be a question about what people learned from performing the previous week's commitment. However, nobody is button-holed and forced to answer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Paintings are set off from their vulgar, every-day surroundings by a picture frame.

Music is set off from the cacophony of mundane life with a frame of silence.

When we engage in activities that are meant to help us grow in wisdom and virtue, we frame that with prayer.

I have chosen a prayer to a physician-saint, Saint Gianna Molla, who will be a strong intercessor for us. She suffered and gave up her life for the life of her child. Of course, in the Opening and Closing Prayers, we call on Our Lady - for wisdom in the Opening Prayer and to comfort the afflicted in the Closing Prayer.

Modes of Learning

Each person learns better in certain ways, and no one learns equally well in all ways. This course allows people the opportunity to learn by several modes.

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| Visual | Reading the word on the page (or computer tablet) |
| Auditory | Hearing the prayers, Gospel, summary and explication, discussions, etc. |
| Kinesthetic | Writing down answers to questions before, during, or after meetings, and performing each weekly commitment |
| Oral | Praying the prayers, answering discussion questions aloud, reading the Gospel or portions of the summary and explication |

TIME COURSE OF EVENTS

I recommend meeting around tables instead of seated in cozy sofas and cushy chairs. As the body is inclined, so is the spirit. If the body is lazy, the mind will tend toward laziness. If the body is alert, the mind is more likely to be alert.

If the group is 12 or less, you can meet around one table. If there are more than 12, I suggest meeting around more than one table. All sections except the discussion questions are done as a whole group. Each discussion question is discussed at each table. This enables more intimate interaction and more opportunities for people to speak.

This “play-by-play” is an outline or goal. You should not adhere to it with a stopwatch.

- 0:00 **Opening Prayer** (Pray aloud together while standing)
- 0:01 **Session Goals** (Person to Leader’s left reads aloud while all stand)
- 0:02 **Gospel Reflection** (Next person to left reads Gospel aloud while all stand)
- 0:04 **Silence** (Five minutes while seated; stay seated until Closing Prayer)
- 0:09 Leader reads **Gospel Reflection Question** and people discuss it
- 0:20 **Summary and Explication of *Salvifici Doloris*** (Continue having people on the left take turns reading a paragraph at a time. When a discussion question in **bold** is reached, the leader reads that question, and each table takes time to discuss it. When the leader thinks the time is appropriate, he then has the next person to left continue reading. Reading and discussions alternate until this section is completed. There are typically 6-7 discussion questions per lesson.)
- 1:20 **Make it Your Own** (Except for the first week, the Leader reads the commitment from the prior week and asks the question(s) assigned. There is discussion. Then, the leader reads the new commitment to be performed before the next lesson and those present discuss what it means and how they might carry it out.)
- 1:29 **Closing Prayers** (Pray aloud together while standing)
- 1:30 **Adjourn** (Meetings should start on time and run no more than 90 minutes. Discussions can be curtailed if a shorter period of time is necessary.)

If you have questions about this course or suggestions for its improvement, please e-mail the author: twmcgovern@comcast.net.

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION (1-4)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand] (This can be modified by each Guild to invoke their own patron)

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Learn to reflect silently on a Gospel passage
2. Commit to memory the verse that serves as the basis for the entire document (Colossians 1:24)

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

3. Consider the various reflections that people of diverse backgrounds have made on the subject of suffering

Why do we silently reflect on the Gospel for five minutes? [Stand] [Read aloud] [This 'bonus section' is only present in Lesson One]

It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:26)

Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth! (Psalm 46:10)

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. (Psalm 62:5)

Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent. (Proverbs 17:28)

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

If one gives answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:13)

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Matthew 25:31-46) [Stand] [Read aloud]

31 “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.**32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, **33** and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. **34** Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35** for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? **38** And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? **39** And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ **41** Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; **42** for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ **44** Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ **45** Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ **46** And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: What do you learn about our Lord's priorities from this Gospel passage?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 1-4 (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. **Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.**)

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. 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" (1).

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. These words have as it were the value of a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy. For this reason Saint Paul writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (2). The joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering, and this discovery, even if it is most personally shared in by Paul of Tarsus who wrote these words, is at the same time valid for others. The Apostle shares his own discovery and rejoices in it because of all those whom it can help—just as it helped him—to understand *the salvific meaning of suffering*.

2. The theme of suffering—precisely under the aspect of this salvific meaning—seems to fit profoundly into the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption as an extraordinary Jubilee of the Church. And this circumstance too clearly favors the attention it deserves during this period. Independently of this fact, it is a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth: in a certain sense it co-exists with him in the world, and thus demands to be constantly reconsidered. Even though Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, wrote that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (3), even though man knows and is close to the sufferings of the animal world, nevertheless what we express by the word "suffering" seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself, precisely because it manifests in its own way that depth which is proper to man, and in its own way surpasses it. Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.

3. The theme of suffering in a special way demands to be faced in the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption, and this is so, in the first place, because the *Redemption* was accomplished *through the Cross of Christ*, that is, *through his suffering*. And at the same time, during the Holy Year of the Redemption we recall the truth expressed in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: in Christ "every man becomes the way for the Church" (4). It can be said that man in a special fashion becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life. This happens, as we know, at different moments in life, it takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost *inseparable from man's earthly existence*.

Assuming then that throughout his earthly life man walks in one manner or another on the long path of suffering, it is precisely on this path that the Church at all times-and perhaps especially during the Holy Year of the Redemption-should meet man. Born of the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ, the Church has *to try to meet* man in a special way on the path of his suffering. In this meeting man "becomes the way for the Church", and this way is one of the most important ones.

4. This is the origin also of the present reflection, precisely in the Year of the Redemption: a meditation on suffering. Human suffering evokes *compassion*; it also evokes *respect*, and in its own way *it intimidates*. For in suffering is contained the greatness of a specific mystery. This special respect for every form of human suffering must be set at the beginning of what will be expressed here later by the deepest *need of the heart*, and also by the deep *imperative of faith*. About the theme of suffering these two reasons seem to draw particularly close to each other and to become one: the need of the heart commands us to overcome fear, and the imperative of faith—formulated, for example, in the words of Saint Paul quoted at the beginning—provides the content, in the name of which and by virtue of which we dare to touch what appears in every man so intangible: for man, in his suffering, remains an intangible mystery.

REFERENCES

- 1) Col. 1:24.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) Rom. 8:22.
- 4) Cf. nos. 14, 18, 21, 22: AAS 71 (1979) 284f., 304, 320, 323.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 1-4 [Read Aloud]

Suffering Saves!

Saint Paul declares that he has discovered joy and meaning in suffering because of its power to save, and he shares this discovery with those of us who seek for meaning in our suffering. He writes a mysterious verse that this course will unpack:

"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)

It seems to me that Paul is on to something greater than room-temperature fusion, a perpetual motion machine, or a car that runs on air. He is claiming that he can take the worst aspect of human life - suffering - and turn it into the greatest thing in human life - happiness. Suffering is something we all avoid for its own sake; happiness is something we all seek for its own sake. If suffering can lead to my happiness, then I have found the secret of life.

Q1. Do you think it is possible to find joy in suffering? Why or why not?

Saint John Paul II wrote this document about the salvific meaning of suffering as part of the celebration of the special Holy Year of the Redemption in 1983-84 celebrating the 1950th anniversary of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. *Salvific* means that something has the power to save or redeem. We will explore deeply *how* suffering is inextricably linked to salvation, *who* it saves, and *what* is the nature of that salvation.

All men in all times and places have and will question the reason for and the meaning of suffering. Atheist ethicist Peter Singer got it very wrong when he said, "In suffering the animals are our equals" (www.theguardian.com/books/2009/feb/15/peter-singer-profile) Pope John Paul, however, teaches us that while man sees animals suffer, what man experiences transcends animal suffering, and indeed, suffering is "essential to the nature of man" (SD2).

Noted Thinkers' Thoughts on Suffering

Throughout history, men of all philosophies and religions have tried to understand suffering. Atheists even view suffering as somehow "unfair", yet if God does not exist, then "fair" and "unfair" have no meaning. Stephen Jay Gould, an atheist paleontologist who contributed to modern theories of evolution, said,

We are the offspring of history and must establish our own paths in this most diverse and interesting of conceivable universes - one indifferent to our suffering, and therefore offering us maximum freedom to thrive, or to fail, in our own chosen way. (Concluding paragraph, *Wonderful Life*, WW Norton & Co. 1989)

While Gould seemed to think suffering had no meaning, recently deceased atheist Christopher Hitchens, who called Blessed Mother Teresa the most evil person of the 20th century, wished that it did. He reflected during his losing battle with cancer that

I sometimes wish I were suffering in a good cause, or risking my life for the good of others, instead of just being a gravely endangered patient. (*Vanity Fair*, August 2010)

Q2. Why do so many people believe that suffering is meaningless?

God-is-dead atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche spoke much truth when he said, "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering"

(mobile.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/friedrich_nietzsche.html). And Karl Marx, father of modern atheistic communism said that, “The only antidote to mental suffering is physical pain” (*Herr Vogt*, Nov 16, 1860), that is, we can only get rid of one kind of suffering with another kind of suffering.

Buddhism, which is a philosophy and not a religion since it does not teach the existence of God, believes that suffering must be avoided. The founder of this philosophy, the Buddha said, “Without health, life is not life; it is only a state of languor and suffering - an image of death.” His follower Bodhidharma and the founder of Zen Buddhism spoke about the goal of Buddhism, “Not suffering another existence is reaching the Way.” It sounds like *that way* is a literal dead end.

Psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, though raised a Jew and influenced by Judaism throughout his life, proclaimed himself an atheist who believed that God was an illusion (*The Future of an Illusion*, 1927). However, he got the relationship of love and suffering profoundly right (as we will explore later in this course) when he said, “We are never so defenseless against suffering as when we love” (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930, p. 29)

The nominal Anglican and practical atheist George Orwell noted the inescapable fact of suffering,

“Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering, and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise” (Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool, *Polemic*, March 1947)

The atheist eugenicist philosopher HG Wells even saw that suffering could have meaning from an earthly perspective, as long as it served for a sort of temporal salvation:

There’s nothing wrong in suffering, if you suffer for a purpose. Our revolution didn’t abolish danger or death. It simply made danger and death worthwhile. (*Things to Come*, 1936).

Q3. How can we use the universal experience of suffering to engage deep conversations with those who are unwilling to talk about God - at least initially?

Suffering is Inescapable

The Redemption of man was accomplished only through Christ’s cross and suffering, not despite his suffering. John Paul writes that “every man becomes the way

for the Church . . . when suffering enters his life” (SD3), and no man escapes the experience of suffering. As author C.S. Lewis wrote

Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-will involves, and you find that you have excluded life itself.

Q4. What happens when man fights against the reality that suffering is “almost inseparable from man’s earthly existence?” (SD 3) In other words, have you seen others continually frustrated with life because they decide they won’t be happy until their suffering is eliminated? Describe your experiences with such people.

The Trappist Monk Thomas Merton wrote in his spiritual autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* that

The truth that many people never understand until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt (p. 91).

Q5. Why is it unrealistic to decide that you will not be happy until suffering is eliminated? How does this “unrealistic view” actually foreshadow eternity?

Because man can always be found on the path of suffering, the Church must continually and in a special way meet man there:

While suffering intimidates us, it also evokes respect and compassion. Our hearts need to overcome our fear of suffering, and it is through faith that we can do this. Yet, even though we can discover reasons for and meaning in suffering, “man in his suffering, remains an intangible mystery” (SD4).

Q6. How do we respect the suffering that we see in our patients? Describe good and bad ways that you have seen other health care professionals respond to suffering in their patients? (Today, too many want to get rid of suffering by getting rid of the *sufferer!*)

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Commitment for Lesson One: Memorize Colossians 1:24 and reflect on it daily

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

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON TWO

THE WORLD OF HUMAN SUFFERING

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Understand the relationship between physical and moral suffering.
2. Learn how to answer the question, "If God created everything, why did he create evil (or suffering)?"
3. Understand what solidarity is and how solidarity among those who suffer is important.

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Matthew 5:38-48) [Stand] [Read aloud]

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
39 But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; **40** and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; **41** and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42** Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. **43** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
44 But I say to you, Love

your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46** For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48** You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: According to Jesus, what does it mean for us to be a son (or daughter) of our Father in heaven?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 5-8 (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

5. Even though in its subjective dimension, as a personal fact contained within man's concrete and unrepeatable interior, suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable, perhaps at the same time nothing else requires as much as does suffering, in *its "objective reality"*, to be dealt with, meditated upon, and conceived as an explicit problem; and that therefore basic questions be asked about it and the answers sought. It is evident that it is not a question here merely of giving a description of suffering. There are other criteria which go beyond the sphere of description, and which we must introduce when we wish to penetrate the world of human suffering.

Medicine, as the science and also the art of healing, discovers in the vast field of human sufferings *the best known area*, the one identified with greater precision and relatively more counterbalanced by the methods of "reaction" (that is, the methods of therapy). Nonetheless, this is only one area. The field of human suffering is much wider, more varied, and multi-dimensional. Man suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in *its* most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is *still wider* than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. A certain idea of this problem comes to us from the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering. This distinction is based upon the double dimension of the human being and indicates the bodily and spiritual element as the immediate or direct subject of suffering. Insofar as the words "suffering" and "pain", can, up to a certain degree, be used as synonyms, *physical suffering* is present when "the body is hurting" in some way, whereas *moral suffering* is "pain of the soul". In fact, it is **a question of pain** of a spiritual nature, and not only of the "psychological" dimension of pain which accompanies both moral and physical suffering. The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. But at the same time, moral suffering seems as it were less identified and less reachable by therapy.

6. Sacred Scripture is a *great book about suffering*. Let us quote from the books of the Old Testament a few examples of situations which bear the signs of suffering, and above all moral suffering: the danger of death (5), the death of one's own children (6) and, especially, the death of the firstborn and only son (7); and then too: the lack of offspring (8), nostalgia for the homeland (9), persecution and hostility of the environment (10), mockery and scorn of the one who suffers (11), loneliness and abandonment (12); and again: the remorse of conscience (13), the difficulty of

understanding why the wicked prosper and the just suffer (14), the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of friends and neighbors (15); and finally: the misfortunes of one's own nation (16).

In treating the human person as a *psychological and physical "whole"*, the Old Testament often links "moral" sufferings with the pain of specific parts of the body: the bones (17), kidneys (18), liver (19), viscera (20), heart (21). In fact one cannot deny that moral sufferings have a "physical" or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.

7. As we see from the examples quoted, we find in Sacred Scripture an extensive list of variously painful situations for man. This varied list certainly does not exhaust all that has been said and constantly repeated on the theme of suffering by *the book of the history of man* (this is rather an "unwritten book"), and even more by the book of the history of humanity, read through the history of every human individual.

It can be said that man suffers whenever *he experiences any kind of evil*. In **the vocabulary** of the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other. In fact, that vocabulary did not have a specific word to indicate "suffering". Thus it defined as "evil" everything that was suffering (22). Only the Greek language, and together with it the New Testament (and the Greek translations of the Old Testament), use the verb "*πάσχω*" (*paskhō*) = "I am affected by I experience a feeling, I suffer"; and, thanks to this verb, suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering. Suffering has indeed both *a subjective and a passive character* (from "patior"). Even when man brings suffering on himself, when he is its cause, this suffering remains something passive in its metaphysical essence.

This does not however mean that suffering in the psychological sense is not marked by a *specific "activity"*. This is in fact that multiple and subjectively differentiated "activity" of pain, sadness, disappointment, discouragement or even despair, according to the intensity of the suffering subject and his or her specific sensitivity. In the midst of what constitutes the psychological form of suffering there is always *an experience of evil*, which causes the individual to suffer.

Thus the reality of suffering prompts the question about the essence of evil: what is evil?

This question seems, in a certain sense, inseparable from the theme of suffering. The Christian response to it is different, for example, from the one given by certain cultural and religious traditions which hold that existence is an evil from which one needs to be liberated. Christianity proclaims the essential *good of existence* and the good of that which exists, acknowledges the goodness of the Creator and proclaims the good of creatures. Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good. We could say that man suffers *because of a good* in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself. He particularly suffers when he *ought*—in the normal order of things—to have a share in this good and does not have it.

Thus, in the Christian view, the reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always, in some way, refers to a good.

8. In itself human suffering constitutes as it were a specific *"world"* which exists together with man, which appears in him and passes, and sometimes does not pass, but which consolidates itself and becomes deeply rooted in him. This world of suffering, divided into many, very many subjects, exists *as it were "in dispersion"*. Every individual, through personal suffering, constitutes not only a small part of "that world", but at the same time "that world" is present in him as a finite and unrepeatable entity. Parallel with this, however, is the inter-human and social dimension. The

world of suffering possesses as it were its *own solidarity*. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation, the trial of their destiny, or through their need for understanding and care, and perhaps above all through the persistent question of the meaning of suffering. Thus, although the world of suffering exists "in dispersion", at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge *to communion and solidarity*. We shall also try to follow this appeal in the present reflection.

Considering the world of suffering in its personal and at the same time collective meaning, one cannot fail to notice the fact that this world, at some periods of time and in some eras of human existence, *as it were becomes particularly concentrated*. This happens, for example, in cases of natural disasters, epidemics, catastrophes, upheavals and various social scourges: one thinks, for example, of a bad harvest and connected with it—or with various other causes—the scourge of famine.

One thinks, finally, of war. I speak of this in a particular way. I speak of the last two World Wars, the second of which brought with it a much greater harvest of death and a much heavier burden of human sufferings. The second half of our century, in *its* turn, brings with it—as *though in proportion to the mistakes and transgressions* of our contemporary civilization—such a horrible threat of nuclear war that we cannot think of this period except in terms of *an incomparable accumulation of sufferings*, even to the possible self-destruction of humanity. In this way, that world of suffering which in brief has its subject in each human being, seems in our age to be transformed—perhaps more than at any other moment—into a special "world": the world which as never before has been transformed by progress through man's work and, at the same time, is as never before in danger because of man's mistakes and offenses.

REFERENCES

- 5) As Hezekiah experienced (cf. Is. 38:1-3).
- 6) As Hagar feared (cf. Gn. 1-16), as Jacob imagined (cf. Gn. 37:33-35), as David experienced (cf. 2 Sm. 19:1).
- 7) As Anna, the mother of Tobias, feared (cf. Tb. 10:1-7); cf. also Jer. 6:26; Am. 8:10; Zec. 12:10.
- 8) Such was the trial of Abraham (cf. Gn. 15:2), of Rachel (cf. Gn. 30:1), or of Anna, the mother of Samuel (cf. 1 Sm. 1:10).
- 9) Such was the lament of the exiles in Babylon (cf. Ps. 137[136]).
- 10) Suffered, for example, by the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 22[21]:17-21) or by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 18:18).
- 11) This was a trial for Job (cf. Jb. 19:18; 3():1, 9), for some Psalmists (cf. Ps. 22[21]:7-9; 42[41]:11; 44[43]:16-17), for Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 20:7), for the Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 53:3).
- 12) Which certain Psalmists had to suffer again (cf. Ps. 22[21]:2-3; 31[30]:13; 38[37]:12; 88[87]:9.19), Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 15:17), or the Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 53:3).
- 13) Of the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 51[50]:5), of the witnesses of the sufferings of the Servant (cf. Is. 53:3-6), of the prophet Zechariah (cf. Zec. 12:10).
- 14) This was strongly felt by the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 73[72]:3-14), and Qoheleth (cf. Eccl. 4:1-3).
- 15) This was a suffering for Job (cf. Jb. 10:19), for certain Psalmists (cf. Ps. 41[40] :10; 55[54]:13-15, for Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 20:10), while Sirach meditated on this misery (cf. Sir. 37:1-6)

16) Besides numerous passages of Lamentations, cf. the laments of the Psalmists (cf. Ps. 44[43]:10-17; 77[76]:11; 89[88]:51), or of the Prophets (cf. Is. 22:4; Jer. 4:8; 13:17; 14:17-18; Ez. 9:8; 21:11-12); also cf. the prayers of Azariah (cf. Dn. 3:31-40) and of Daniel (cf. Dn. 9:16-19).

17) For example, Is. 38:13; Jer. 23:9; Ps. 31[30]:10-11; Ps. 42[41]:10-11 .

18) For example, Ps. 73[72]:21; Jb. 16:13; Lam. 3:13.

19) For example, Lam. 2:11.

20) For example, Is. 16:11; Jer. 4:I[9]; Jb. 30:27; Lam. 1:20.

21) For example, 1 Sm. 1:8; Jer. 4:19; 8:18; Lam. 1:20, 22; Ps. 38[37]:9, 11.

22) In this regard, it is useful to remember that the Hebrew root *r*" designates in a comprehensive way what is evil, as opposed to what is good (*tob*) without distinguishing between the physical, psychological and ethical senses. The root is found in the substantive form *ra'* and *ra'a* indicating indifferently either evil in itself, or the evil action, or the individual who does it. In the verbal forms, besides the simple one (*qal*) variously designating "being evil," there are the reflexive passive form (*niphal*) "to endure evil," "to be affected by evil" and the causative form (*hiphil*) "to do evil," "to inflict evil" on someone. Since the Hebrew lacks a true equivalent to the Greek "πάσχω," "I suffer," this verb too occurs rarely in the Septuagint translation.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 5-8 [Read aloud] [Sit down]

Suffering in the Body; Suffering in the Soul

More than any other human experience, the problem of suffering demands answers to questions about its nature and meaning. Physical suffering, or sickness, constitutes the best known type of suffering, and modern medicine contributes its science and art to alleviate much of the "pain of the body". However, even the most advanced medicine cannot alleviate the deeper and more complex problem of moral suffering - "pain of the soul" (SD5). Suffering of both the body and the soul have an accompanying psychological dimension, but moral suffering is greater than psychological suffering and less reachable by medical treatment.

Q1. Does that fact that we experience suffering that is not due to physical illness or injury evidence that we are more than the sum of our material parts? Why or why not?

The Old Testament portrays many types of moral suffering: danger of death, the death of one's children, infertility, persecution, mockery, loneliness, seeing the wicked prosper and the just suffer, among others. The Scriptures recognize that moral sufferings can lead to physical pain when they portray certain moral sufferings as causing pain in parts of the body such as the bones, kidneys, or heart. Any kind of suffering can affect all parts of a person.

I cry for help until morning; like a lion he breaks all my bones; from day to night thou dost bring me to an end. (Isaiah 38:13)

My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and because of his holy words. (Jeremiah 23:9)

When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant, I was like a beast toward thee.” (Psalm 73:21)

He slashes open my kidneys, and does not spare; he pours out my gall on the ground. (Job 16:13)

He drove into my heart the arrows of his quiver. . . He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood. (Lamentations 3:13, 15)

Q2. What are some of the ways that patients have expressed to you the depth of their suffering? Do they use words that remind you of these passages from Scripture?

Mental illness can precede or exacerbate physical disease such as coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, back pain, irritable bowel syndrome, multiple sclerosis, and possibly type 2 diabetes. Patients with physical maladies, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and psoriasis have higher than average rates of depression (www.psychcentral.com/lib/the-relationship-between-mental-and-physical-health/0002949).

Depression among those with chronic physical illnesses is likely to be missed by professionals who care for physically sick patients. This is because health professionals are understandably concerned with the physical disorder which is usually the reason for the consultation, and may not be aware of the accompanying depression. (Goldberg D. *World Psychiatry* 9:16-20.)

Q3. How are physical and moral sufferings similar and different for your patients to bear? For *you* to bear?

Q4. In what ways have you seen moral sufferings cause physical ailments in yourself or others? Why is it important for a health care professional to recognize this?

What is Suffering?

Saint John Paul defines suffering as **man's experience of any kind of evil** (SD7). In fact, the Old Testament identified suffering and evil together because the Hebrew language contained no word to express "suffering". But in the Greek language of the New Testament (and Greek translations of the Old Testament), man was able to express that suffering is a situation in which man experiences evil.

Suffering has both a passive and active character. Subjectively, suffering is something we passively endure or allow, or to which we submit or acquiesce. In its essence, suffering is something that happens *to us* and is therefore passive. However, suffering possesses psychological activity including "pain, sadness, disappointment, discouragement or even despair" (SD7).

Q5. Have you ever been asked why God creates or allows evil? How did you answer?

Why did God create evil? (Spoiler Alert: He didn't)

To better understand suffering, we must understand its cause - evil. What is evil? In its essence, evil is nothing - it is a "certain lack, limitation or distortion of good" (SD7).

The following viral internet story helps to illustrate this. While some have identified the student in the story as Einstein, there is no evidence that such a conversation ever took place during his life. However, the truths in this fictional conversation remain nevertheless.

The university Physics professor challenged his students with this question.

"Did God create everything that exists?"

A student bravely replied, "Yes, he did!"

"God created everything?" The professor asked.

"Yes sir", the student replied.

The professor answered, "If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principal that our works define who we are, then God is evil".

The student became quiet before such an answer. The professor, quite pleased with himself, boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth.

Another student raised his hand and said, "Can I ask you a question professor?"

"Of course", replied the professor.

The student stood up and asked, "Professor, does cold exist?"

"What kind of question is this? Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?"

The students snickered at the young man's question.

The young man replied, "In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the Laws of Physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Every body or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-460°F) is the total absence of heat; all matter becomes inert and incapable of reaction at that temperature. Cold does not exist. We have created this word to describe how we feel if we have no heat."

The student continued, "Professor, does darkness exist?"

The professor responded, "Of course it does."

The student replied, "Once again you are wrong, sir, darkness does not exist either. Darkness is in reality the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact we can use Newton's prism to break white light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color. You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Isn't this correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what happens when there is no light present."

Finally the young man asked the professor, "Sir, does evil exist?"

Now uncertain, the professor responded, "Of course as I have already said. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the

multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil."

To this the student replied, "Evil does not exist, sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is not like faith or love that exists just as does light and heat. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light."

The professor sat down.

Evil cannot be created; good can only be corrupted. "Man suffers because of a good in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself" (SD7). Evil is a lack of a good - just as cold is a lack of heat, darkness is a lack of light, and dryness is a lack of moisture.

Solidarity among the suffering - and their caregivers

Each person experiences his own suffering and cannot transfer his suffering to another or experience another person's suffering. We only know what our own suffering feels like. However, all those who suffer experience a certain **solidarity**, become like each other, and know how to understand each other - they speak the same language of suffering. They persistently question the meaning of suffering and are challenged to a deeper communion and solidarity with others who suffer.

Solidarity is one of the bedrock principles of Catholic Social teaching along with other principles such as subsidiarity, human dignity, religious freedom, private property rights, a preferential option for the poor, and the rights of workers. Solidarity denotes the union, fellowship, friendship, or social charity arising from common responsibilities and interests, as between members of a group or between classes and peoples. In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II wrote that solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (SRS 38).

Q6. With the above understanding of *solidarity* in mind, how important is it for a health care professional to have experienced suffering? Why?

Q7. When you are suffering, how important is it that those who try to comfort you have also experienced suffering? Why?

Q8. When you are suffering, what do you desire from others? When *your patients* are suffering, what do you think they desire from others? From you?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson One: Who memorized Colossians 1:24? What fruit have you gleaned so far from your reflection on it?

Commitment for Lesson Two: Write out your answer to how you will answer the question:

If God created everything that exists, why did he create evil (or suffering)?

Have someone ask you this question and practice your answer aloud so that you are ready when someone asks you this. (This is *not* the same as the question, “Why does God allow suffering?” We will discuss that in later lessons.)

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON THREE

THE QUEST FOR AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Understand the lessons that the Book of Job teaches us about various reasons that people suffer
2. Learn that the meaning of suffering is inextricably linked to love and that the price of love is suffering
3. Determine to discover what other people think is the meaning of suffering

GOSPEL REFLECTION (John 8:39-47)

39 [The Jews who had believed in Jesus] answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, **40** but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. **41** You do what your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one

Father, even God.” **42** Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. **43** Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **45** But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. **46** Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? **47** He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: Which of the devil’s lies are you most prone to believe? Which words of God can best combat those lies?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 9-13 (This is the basis for this lesson’s discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

9. Within each form of suffering endured by man, and at the same time at the basis of the whole world of suffering, there inevitably arises *the question: why?* It is a question about the cause, the reason, and equally, about the purpose of suffering, and, in brief, a question about its meaning. Not only does it accompany human suffering, but it seems even to determine its human content, what makes suffering precisely human suffering.

It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer. This is a *difficult question*, just as is a question closely akin to it, the question of evil. Why does evil exist? Why is there evil in the world? When we put the question in this way, we are always, at least to a certain extent, asking a question about suffering too.

Both questions are difficult, when an individual puts them to another individual, when people put them to other people, as also when man *puts them to God*. For man does not put this question to the world, even though it is from the world that suffering often comes to him, but he puts it to God as the Creator and Lord of the world. And it is well known that concerning this question there not only arise many frustrations and conflicts in the relations of man with God, but it also happens that people reach the point of actually *denying God*. For, whereas the existence of the world opens as it were the eyes of the human soul to the existence of God, to his wisdom, power and greatness, evil and suffering seem to obscure this image, sometimes in a radical way, especially in the daily drama of so many cases of undeserved suffering and of so many faults without proper punishment. So this circumstance shows—perhaps more than any other—the importance of *the question of the meaning of suffering*; it also shows how much care must be taken both in dealing with the question itself and with all possible answers to it.

10. Man can put this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the Revelation of the Old Testament. In the Book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression.

The story of this just man, who without any fault of his own is tried by innumerable sufferings, is well known. He loses his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself is afflicted by a grave sickness. In this horrible situation three old acquaintances come to his house, and each one in his own way tries to convince him that since he has been struck down by such varied and terrible sufferings, *he must have done something seriously wrong*. For suffering—they say—always strikes a man as punishment for a crime; it is sent by the absolutely just God and finds its reason in the order of justice. It can be said that Job's old friends wish not only to *convince him* of the moral justice of the evil, but in a certain sense they attempt to *justify* to themselves the moral meaning of suffering. In their eyes suffering can have a meaning only as a punishment for sin, therefore only on the level of God's justice, who repays good with good and evil with evil.

The point of reference in this case is the doctrine expressed in other Old Testament writings which show us suffering as punishment inflicted by God for human sins. The God of Revelation is the *Lawgiver and Judge* to a degree that no temporal authority can see. For the God of Revelation is first of all the Creator, from whom comes, together with existence, the essential good of creation. Therefore, the conscious and free violation of this good by man is not only a transgression of the law but at the same time an offense against the Creator, who is the first Lawgiver. Such a transgression has the character of sin, according to the exact meaning of this word, namely the biblical and theological one. *Corresponding to the moral evil of sin is punishment*, which guarantees the moral order in the same transcendent sense in which this order is laid down by the will of the Creator and Supreme Lawgiver. From this there also derives one of the fundamental truths of religious faith, equally based upon Revelation, namely that God is a just judge, who rewards good and punishes evil: "For thou **art just in all that thou hast** done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right, and all thy judgments are truth. Thou hast executed true judgments in all that thou hast brought upon us... for in truth and justice thou hast brought all this upon us because of our sins" (23).

The opinion expressed by Job's friends manifests a conviction also found in the moral conscience of humanity: the objective moral order demands punishment for transgression, sin and crime. From this point of view, suffering appears as a "justified evil". The conviction of those who explain suffering as a punishment for sin finds support in the order of justice, and this corresponds to the conviction expressed by one of Job's friends: "As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (24).

11. Job however challenges the truth of the principle that identifies suffering with punishment for sin. And he does this on the basis of his own opinion. For he is aware that he has not deserved such punishment, and in fact he speaks of the good that he has done during his life. In the end, God himself reproves Job's friends for their accusations and recognizes that Job is not guilty. His suffering is the suffering of someone who is innocent and it must be accepted as a mystery, which the individual is unable to penetrate completely by his own intelligence.

The Book of Job does not violate the foundations of the transcendent moral order, based upon justice, as they are set forth by the whole of Revelation, in both the Old and the New Covenants. At the same time, however, this Book shows with all firmness that the principles of this order cannot be applied in an exclusive and superficial way. While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, *it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment*. The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this

in the Old Testament. Revelation, which is the word of God himself, with complete frankness presents the problem of the suffering of an innocent man: suffering without guilt. Job has not been punished, there was no reason for inflicting a punishment on him, even if he has been subjected to a grievous trial. From the introduction of the Book it is apparent that God permitted this testing as a result of Satan's provocation. For Satan had challenged before the Lord the righteousness of Job: "Does Job fear God for nought? ... Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face" (25). And if the Lord consents to test Job with suffering, he does it *to demonstrate the latter's righteousness*. The suffering has the nature of a test.

The Book of Job is not the last word on this subject in Revelation. In a certain way it is a foretelling of the Passion of Christ. But already in itself it is *sufficient argument* why the answer to the question about the meaning of suffering is not to be unreservedly linked to the moral order, based on justice alone. While such an answer has a fundamental and transcendent reason and validity, at the same time it is seen to be not only unsatisfactory in cases similar to the suffering of the just man Job, but it even seems to trivialize and impoverish *the concept of justice* which we encounter in Revelation.

12. The Book of Job poses in an extremely acute way the question of the "why" of suffering; it also shows that suffering strikes the innocent, but it does not yet give the solution to the problem.

Already in the Old Testament we note an orientation that begins to go beyond the concept according to which suffering has a meaning only as a punishment for sin, insofar as it emphasizes at the same time the educational value of suffering as a punishment. Thus in the sufferings inflicted by God upon the Chosen People there is included an invitation of his mercy, which corrects in order to lead to conversion: "... these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people" (26).

Thus the personal dimension of punishment is affirmed. According to this dimension, punishment has a meaning not only because it serves *to* repay the objective evil of the transgression with another evil, but first and foremost because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers.

This is an extremely important aspect of suffering. It is profoundly rooted in the entire Revelation of the Old and above all the New Covenant. Suffering must serve *for conversion*, that is, *for the rebuilding of goodness* in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God.

13. But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must open ourselves wide to the human subject in his manifold potentiality. We must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is: also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

REFERENCES

23) Dn. 3:27ff.; cf. Ps. 19[18]:10; 36[35]:7; 48[47]:12; 51[50]:6; 99[98]:4; 119[118]:75; Mal. 3:16-21; Mt. 20:16; Mk. 10:31; Lk. 17:34; Jn. 5:30; Rom. 2:2.

24) Jb. 4:8.

25) Jb. 1:9-11.

26) 2 Mc. 6:12.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 9-13 [Read aloud]

Man Questions God

Unlike the animals, man asks the question “Why?” when he suffers. Man wants to know the cause, the reason, the purpose and ultimately, the meaning of suffering. Man’s questioning is what makes his suffering, *human suffering*. If man does not find satisfactory answers to his questions about suffering, his suffering takes on a greater intensity. “Why does evil exist?” is a question closely allied to questions about suffering.

Instinctively, man puts these questions to God and not to the world. When C.S. Lewis reflected on his life before his conversion to Christianity, he said

I was at that time living like many atheists; in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with him for creating a world. Why should creatures have the burden of existence forced on them without their consent?

From the context of the quote, it is possible Lewis was angry at God for not existing because he could not question God about the suffering associated with human existence. When man does not find suitable answers to questions about suffering, the reality of suffering and evil becomes the primary intellectual reason that he denies God and decides to be an atheist. Because suffering and evil obscure the image of God and lead many away from him, we have a duty, especially as Catholic health care professionals, to have satisfactory answers to questions about the meaning of suffering.

Q1. Have you known anyone who would not believe in God because of the existence of suffering or evil? Tell us a story.

Q2. What has been the effect of your own suffering on your own beliefs and attitudes toward God?

The Book of Job - Suffering isn't always punishment

God expects us to ask him about the reasons for and meaning of suffering. One entire book of the Bible deals with this in a vivid way, the Book of Job. Job is a just man, and Satan tells God that Job would not be a righteous man if Job lost his many worldly goods. God allows Satan to inflict Job with terrible sufferings: the loss of his numerous possessions, the death of his sons and daughters, and grave physical illness. Three “counselors” visit Job to tell him that since he is suffering so deeply, he must have done something to deserve them; they believe that suffering *only* has meaning as a punishment for sin.

Their belief is not unreasonable. The Old Testament shows that “God is a just judge, who rewards good and punishes evil” (SD10). The objective moral order (natural law) also demands that sins and crimes are punished. The cry “It’s not fair” rings out from mouths of atheists and theists alike; something deep in our human makeup tells us that there is such a thing as justice and that injustice must be righted - often through punishment.

Q3. Where do you think people get the idea “it’s not fair”? Is that view consistent with a materialistic or atheistic worldview? Why or why not?

The error Job’s acquaintances make is that just because sin (A) leads to suffering (B), that therefore all suffering (B) is due to sin (A). This, however, does not logically follow. In the Book of Job, God sides with Job who tells his “counselors” that he has done nothing to merit his suffering. Job suffers as one who is innocent, and the suffering of the innocent is indeed a mystery in the strict sense - a mystery being a reality about which we can know *something*, but not everything. In the case of Job, God allowed his suffering “to demonstrate [Job’s] righteousness. [His] suffering has the nature of a test” (SD11).

He even speaks of the Almighty as his enemy, but he never doubts, at the back of his mind, that his enemy has some kind of a case which he does not understand. In a fine and famous blasphemy he says, “Oh, that mine adversary had written a book!” (31:35). It never really occurs to him that it could possibly be a bad book. He is anxious to be convinced, that is, he thinks that God could convince him. (GK Chesterton, *Introduction to the Book of Job*)

Q4. What is your understanding of the term *mystery*? What role does *mystery* play in your life?

God Answers Man - Sort of

When Job complains to God about his sufferings, the only answer he gets is a four-chapter speech of yet *more* questions including “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38-41). In his *Introduction to the Book of Job*, GK Chesterton enlightens us regarding Job’s darkness:

This, I say, is the first fact touching the speech; the fine inspiration by which God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles, but to propound them. The other great fact which, taken together with this one, makes the whole work religious instead of merely philosophical is that other great surprise which makes Job suddenly satisfied with the mere presentation of something impenetrable. Verbally speaking, the enigmas of Jehovah seem darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job; yet Job was comfortless before the speech of Jehovah and is comforted after it. He has been told nothing, but he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.

The book of Job is chiefly remarkable, as I have insisted throughout, for the fact that it does not end in a way that is conventionally satisfactory. Job is not told that his misfortunes were due to his sins or a part of any plan for his improvement.

Job’s Suffering Foreshadows Christ’s Suffering

In the end, Job realizes that God cannot be condemned for his actions, that all God’s actions cannot be understood, and that the best thing he can do is “despise [himself], and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6).

Job’s suffering foretells the Passion of Christ; the suffering of the ultimate innocent man. His suffering proves that the meaning of suffering is not *only* linked to the concept of justice as punishment for transgressions. While the Book of Job poses the question about the “why” of suffering in an eloquent way, it does not provide us a solution to the problem!

Q5. Why is Job comforted after his interview with God, even though God did not answer Job’s question about why he was suffering?

Old Testament Lessons on Suffering

So far, the Old Testament has shed some light on the reasons for suffering: punishment for sin and for the purpose of testing one's character. We also learn from the Old Testament that suffering as a punishment has educational value that disciplines individuals, calls them to repentance, and rebuilds goodness in the one who suffers. So suffering not only can balance the scales of justice through punishment, but this punishment is meant ultimately to build up the one suffering to be more human, more virtuous. "Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject" (SD12).

The true answer to the "why" of suffering can only be found in "the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists" (SD 13): divine love. "Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery" (SD13). Reggae singer and pop philosopher Bob Marley understood that there is an essential link between love and suffering when he said

Truth is, everybody is going to hurt you. You just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.

We will grasp the meaning of suffering *to the extent that we are "capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love . . . This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ" (13). The price of love . . . is suffering.*

Q6. According to Saint John Paul, suffering "creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers" (SD12). **Give an example where suffering in your life or the life of another led to a greater good that probably would not have happened had the suffering not occurred?**

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Two: Who wrote out their answer to the question

If God created everything that exists, why did he create evil (or suffering)?

Who had a chance to answer it aloud?

Commitment for Lesson Three: Ask at least three people (relatives, friends, patients) the following question: **What is the meaning of suffering. Write down their answers.**

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON FOUR

JESUS CHRIST SUFFERING CONQUERED BY LOVE

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Ponder why all men are not actively seeking salvation in Christ which provides the only liberation from evil that all desire
2. Determine to immerse yourself in the sufferings of others
3. Understand that if God suffered throughout his life on earth as a man that we should expect to suffer throughout our lives, too

GOSPEL REFLECTION (John 3:1-16) [Stand] [Read aloud]

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." **3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb

and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' **8** The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." **9** Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?" **10** Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." **16** For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: In what ways can you identify with Nicodemus as he converses with Our Lord?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 14-16 (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

14. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (27). These words, spoken by Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus, introduce us into the very heart of *God's salvific work*. They also express the very essence of Christian soteriology, that is, of the theology of salvation. Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. According to the words spoken to Nicodemus, God gives his Son to "the world" to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering. At the same time, the very word "*gives*" ("gave") indicates that this liberation must be achieved by the only-begotten Son through his own suffering. And in this, love is manifested, the infinite love both of that only-begotten Son and of the Father who for this reason "gives" his Son. This is love for man, love for the "world": it is salvific love.

We here find ourselves—and we must clearly realize this in our shared reflection on this problem—faced with a completely new dimension of our theme. It is a different dimension from the one which was determined and, in a certain sense, concluded the search for the meaning of suffering within the limits of justice. This is *the dimension of Redemption*, to which in the Old Testament, at least in the Vulgate text, the words of the just man Job already seem to refer: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last... I shall see God..." (28). Whereas our consideration has so far concentrated primarily and in a certain sense exclusively on suffering in its multiple temporal dimension (as also the sufferings of the just man Job), the words quoted above from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus refer to *suffering in its fundamental and definitive meaning*. God gives his only-begotten Son so that man "should not perish" and the meaning of these words "should not perish" is precisely specified by the words that follow: "but have eternal life".

Man "perishes" when he loses "eternal life". The opposite of salvation is not, therefore, only temporal suffering, any kind of suffering, but the definitive suffering: the loss of eternal life, being rejected by God, damnation. The only-begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against *definitive suffering*. In his salvific mission, the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history. These transcendental roots of evil are grounded in sin and death: for they are at the basis of the loss of eternal life. The mission of the only-begotten Son consists in *conquering sin and death*. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection.

15. When one says that Christ by his mission strikes at evil at its very roots, we have in mind not only evil and definitive, eschatological suffering (so that man "should not perish, but have eternal life"), but also—at least indirectly *toil and suffering* in their *temporal and historical dimension*. For evil remains bound to sin and death. And even if we must use great caution in judging man's suffering as a consequence of concrete sins (this is shown precisely by the example of the just man Job), nevertheless suffering cannot be divorced from the sin of the beginnings, from what Saint John calls "the sin of the world" (29), *from the sinful background* of the personal actions and social processes in human history. Though it is not licit to apply here the narrow criterion of direct dependance (as Job's three friends did), it is equally true that one cannot reject the criterion that, at the basis of human suffering, there is a complex involvement with sin.

It is the same when we deal with *death*. It is often awaited even as a liberation from the suffering of this life. At the same time, it is not possible to ignore the fact that it constitutes as it were a definitive summing-up of the destructive work both in the bodily organism and in the psyche. But death primarily involves *the dissolution* of the entire psychophysical personality of man. The soul survives and subsists separated from the body, while the body is subjected to gradual decomposition according to the words of the Lord God, pronounced after the sin committed by man at the beginning of his earthly history: "You are dust and to dust you shall return" (30). Therefore, even if death is not a form of suffering in the temporal sense of the word, even if in *a certain way* it is *beyond all forms of suffering*, at the same time the evil which the human being experiences in death has a definitive and total character. By his salvific work, the only-begotten Son liberates man from sin and death. First of all he *blots out* from human history *the dominion of sin*, which took root under the influence of the evil Spirit, beginning with Original Sin, and then he gives man the possibility of living in Sanctifying Grace. In the wake of his victory over sin, he also takes away the dominion *of death*, by his Resurrection beginning the process of the future resurrection of the body. Both are essential conditions of "eternal life", that is of man's definitive happiness in union with God; this means, for the saved, that in the eschatological perspective suffering is totally blotted out.

As a result of Christ's salvific work, man exists on earth *with the hope* of eternal life and holiness. And even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his Cross and Resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life, nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence, it nevertheless *throws a new light* upon this dimension and upon every suffering: the light of salvation. This is the light of the Gospel, that is, of the Good News. At the heart of this light is the truth expounded in the conversation with Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (31). This truth radically changes the picture of man's history and his earthly situation: in spite of the sin that took root in this history both as an original

inheritance and as the "sin of the world" and as the sum of personal sins, God the Father has loved the only-begotten Son, that is, he loves him in a lasting way; and then in time, precisely through this all surpassing love, he "gives" this Son, that he may strike at the very roots of human evil and thus draw close in a salvific way to the whole world of suffering in which man shares.

16. In his messianic activity in the midst of Israel, Christ drew increasingly closer *to the world of human suffering*. "He went about doing good" (32), and his actions concerned primarily those who were suffering and seeking help. He healed the sick, consoled the afflicted, fed the hungry, freed people from deafness, from blindness, from leprosy, from the devil and from various physical disabilities, three times he restored the dead to life. He was sensitive to every human suffering, whether of the body or of the soul. And at the same time he taught, and at the heart of his teaching there are *the eight beatitudes*, which are addressed to people tried by various sufferings in their temporal life. These are "the poor in spirit" and "the afflicted" and "those who hunger and thirst for justice" and those who are "persecuted for justice sake", when they insult them, persecute them and speak falsely every kind of evil against them for the sake of Christ... (33). Thus according to Matthew; Luke mentions explicitly those "who hunger now" (34).

At any rate, Christ drew close above all to the world of human suffering through the fact of having taken *this suffering upon his very self*. During his public activity, he experienced not only fatigue, homelessness, misunderstanding even on the part of those closest to him, but, more than anything, he became progressively more and more isolated and encircled by hostility and the preparations for putting him to death. Christ is aware of this, and often speaks to his disciples of the sufferings and death that await him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man *will be delivered* to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise" (35). Christ goes toward his Passion and death with full awareness of the mission that he has to fulfill precisely in this way. Precisely *by means of this suffering* he must bring it about "that man should not perish, but have eternal life". Precisely by means of his Cross he must strike at the roots of evil, planted in the history of man and in human souls. Precisely by means of his Cross he must accomplish *the work of salvation*. This work, in the plan of eternal Love, has a redemptive character.

And therefore Christ severely reproves Peter when the latter wants to make him abandon the thoughts of suffering and of death on the Cross (36). And when, during his arrest in Gethsemane, the same Peter tries to defend him with the sword, Christ says, " Put your sword back into its place... But how then *should the scriptures be fulfilled*, that it must be so? (37)". And he also says, "Shall I not drink the *cup which the Father has given me?*" (38). This response, like others that reappear in different points of the Gospel, shows how profoundly Christ was imbued by the thought that he had already expressed in the conversation with Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (39). Christ goes toward his own suffering, aware of its saving power; he goes forward in obedience to the Father, but primarily he is *united to the Father in this love* with which he has loved the world and man in the world. And for this reason Saint Paul will write of Christ: "He loved me and gave himself for me" (40).

REFERENCES

27) Jn. 3:16.

28) Jb. 19:25-26.

29) Jn. 1:29.

30) Gn. 3:19.

31) Jn. 3:16.

32) Acts 10:38.

33) Cf. Mt. 5:3-11.

34) Cf. Lk. 6:12.

35) Mk. 10:33-34.

36) Cf. Mt. 16:23.

37) Mt. 26:52, 54.

38) Jn. 18:11.

39) Jn. 3:16.

40) Gal. 2:20.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 14-16 [Read aloud]

The Price of Love is Suffering

In the last lesson, we learned about two different reasons for suffering. First, suffering can be punishment for sin; Job's counselors thought that suffering was the only possible reason for suffering. Second, suffering can be a test to demonstrate righteousness, as it was in the case of Job. In this lesson, we take a further step to see that suffering is both *necessary for love* and *conquered by love*. There can be no love without suffering. The great Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky knew this instinctively and wrote, "I want to suffer so that I may love" (*The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*). If we live out this radical idea that *the price of love is suffering*, we will be like the early Christians about whom the pagans said, "See how they love one another" (Tertullian, *Apology* 39).

Salvation is Liberation from Evil

John 3:16 affirms that the greatest love required the greatest suffering: "For God so loved that world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life". The love of God is the greatest love and the suffering and death of God on the Cross was the greatest suffering in history - yet they were mysteriously united. Salvation means "liberation from evil" (SD14), and the salvation of man required the suffering of God. The infinite love of God dying on the cross for man is a "*salvific love*" (SD14); his love saves us from evil that we might have eternal life.

**Q1. If (A), all men want to eliminate evil in their lives, and
If (B), all evil can be liberated by salvation, then why do NOT
Therefore (C), all men seek salvation (to be liberated from evil)?
Or (D), are all men seeking salvation, but many in the wrong places?**

Job's acquaintances looked for the meaning of suffering within the limits of justice. But even Job saw beyond justice to a greater purpose for suffering, the purpose of redemption: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last . . . I shall see God" (Job 19:25-26).

God's suffering on the Cross saves us from damnation, the definitive suffering and evil of eternal separation from God. God the Father gave his only Son to suffer to conquer sin and death. The Son "conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection" (SD14).

Q2. Why don't most people see an urgent need for their own salvation?

Q3. How urgently do you sense the need for *your own* salvation from your sins and potential damnation?

Q4. How urgently do you sense a need for the salvation of others?

At the Basis of Suffering is a Complex Involvement with Sin

While there is not a strict cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering, "suffering cannot be divorced from the sin of the beginnings", Original Sin, "and from the sinful background of the personal actions and social processes in human history. . . At the basis of human suffering, there is a complex involvement with sin" (SD15).

Death is the definitive result of the destructive effects of sin on the body and soul as they become separated from one another until the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Because of Christ's salvific work, sin has no further dominion over us since we have the "possibility of living in Sanctifying Grace" (SD15). If we live in this grace and join God in Heaven, suffering will be totally removed from our experience - forever.

Q5. What is your experience of the relationship between sin and suffering?

Christ's Life - Full of Suffering from Beginning to End

As much as we might like it, Christ's salvific love *does not* free us from temporal sufferings, but it does throw a new light upon suffering: "the light of salvation" (SD15). We see that a significant part of the meaning of suffering is bound up in God's loving suffering for our freedom from definitive suffering. The suffering of our patients is multiplied when it seems meaningless, but their suffering is reduced when they find meaning in it. Suffering has meaning because it can save; it can save us and others from sin.

Christ's early private life in the Gospels seems constantly to be a life of suffering:

- His very conception brings moral anguish to Joseph
- The journey to his birthplace requires a difficult journey for Mary
- His birth takes place in a cave without comforts
- He must flee as an infant to avoid slaughter by Herod
- He must live in Egypt as a young child for years until the threat of Herod the Great has passed

In public life, Christ immerses himself in the sufferings of others

- He heals the sick
- He consoles the afflicted
- He feeds the hungry
- He frees people from deafness, muteness, blindness, leprosy, and the devil
- He restores the dead to life
- He grants forgiveness of sins to those suffering in spirit due to their sins
- He addresses his most famous sermon, the Beatitudes, to those suffering in various ways (due to poverty, affliction, insults, persecutions, hunger, etc.)

As St. Augustine said, "God had one son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering". In his public life, Christ unites himself to our sufferings by experiencing them *in his own body*:

- He is greatly fatigued
- He is homeless
- He is misunderstood, even by his closest friends
- He is isolated by the hostility of others
- He experiences the anticipation of his final suffering of death which he prophesies to his disciples three times in the Gospels

If Christ could not Escape Suffering, Neither Can We

Author Elisabeth Eliot comments on the seeming irrationality and unbelievability that God would suffer:

Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering The love of God did not protect His own Son He will not necessarily protect us - not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process. - Elisabeth Eliot, *Passion and Purity: Learning to Bring your Love Life Under Christ's Control*

“Precisely by means of this suffering he must bring it about ‘that man should not perish, but have eternal life’” (SD16). He can walk toward the Cross because he knows that the suffering of his infinite love will have infinite power to redeem.

When Christ prophesies his own execution, Peter tries to prevent him. When Christ is arrested in Gethsemane, Peter draws his sword. Both times, Christ tells Peter that he must undergo this suffering. This type of sacrifice is beyond human experience and understanding even for Peter, one of Christ’s inner circle. Christ realizes that his suffering has saving power; Peter does not yet realize that. But he will when enlightened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then he will realize that Christ suffered out of his love for the Father and for us. In his first sermon on Pentecost, Peter will say in different words what Saint Paul later wrote, “He loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Q6. Why did Christ spend his public life immersed in the sufferings of others?

Q7. As a health care professional, how can you be like Christ and immerse yourself in the suffering of others?

Q8. How might you respond to a patient who says to you, “God does not care about my sufferings” or “God does not understand my sufferings”?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Three: Who asked at least three people “What is the meaning of suffering?” What were their answers?

Commitment for Lesson Four: Immerse yourself in someone else’s suffering. Choose a family members, friend, or patient and

- 1 - Pray daily for the relief of their suffering
- 2 - Offer one small sacrifice a day for the alleviation of their suffering
- 3 - Do something to show you that you care about them in their suffering (visit, talk, write, bring them a gift, etc.)

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON FIVE

JESUS CHRIST SUFFERING CONQUERED BY LOVE (continued)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. See the Passion of Christ with clearer eyes through the Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah
2. Develop your "Spiritual Eyesight" to better see the suffering of others
3. Develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between love and suffering

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Matthew 27:38-50) [Stand] [Read aloud]

38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads **40** and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." **41** So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, **42** "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. **43** He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires

him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" **44** And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" **47** And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "This man is calling Eli'jah." **48** And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. **49** But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Eli 'jah will come to save him." **50** And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: With which of the characters in this passage do you most identify? Why?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 17-18 (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

17. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled. There were many messianic texts in the Old Testament which foreshadowed the sufferings of the future Anointed One of God. Among all these, particularly touching is the one which is commonly called the *Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant*, in the Book of Isaiah. The Prophet, who has rightly been called "the Fifth Evangelist", presents in this Song an image of the sufferings of the Servant with a realism as acute as if he were seeing them with his own eyes: the eyes of the body and of the spirit. In the light of the verses of Isaiah, the Passion of Christ becomes almost more expressive and touching than in the descriptions of the Evangelists themselves. Behold, the true Man of Sorrows presents himself before us:

"He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray
we have turned every one to his own way;
and *the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*"(41).

The Song of the Suffering Servant contains a description in which it is possible, in a certain sense, to identify the stages of Christ's Passion in their various details: the arrest, the humiliation, the blows, the spitting, the contempt for the prisoner, the unjust sentence, and then the scourging, the crowning with thorns and the mocking, the carrying of the Cross, the crucifixion and the agony.

Even more than this description of the Passion, what strikes us in the words of the Prophet is *the depth of Christ's sacrifice*. Behold, He, though innocent, takes upon himself the sufferings of all people, because he takes upon himself the sins of all. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all": *all* human sin in its breadth and depth becomes the true cause of the Redeemer's suffering. If the suffering "is measured" by the evil suffered, then the words of the Prophet enable us to understand *the extent of this evil* and suffering with which Christ burdened himself. It can be said that this is "substitutive" suffering; but above all it is "redemptive". The Man of Sorrows of that prophecy is truly that "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"(42). In his suffering, sins are cancelled out precisely because he alone as the only-begotten Son could take them upon himself, 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.

Here we touch upon the duality of nature of a single personal subject of redemptive suffering.

He who by his Passion and death on the Cross brings about the Redemption is the only-begotten Son whom God "gave". And at the same time this *Son who is consubstantial with the Father suffers as a man*. His suffering has human dimensions; it also has unique in the history of humanity—a depth and intensity which, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only-begotten Son himself: "God from God". Therefore, only he—the only-begotten Son—is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: in every sin and in "total" sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth.

18. It can be said that the above considerations now brings us directly to Gethsemane and Golgotha, where the Song of the Suffering Servant, contained in the Book of Isaiah, was fulfilled. But before going there, let us read the next verses of the Song, which give a prophetic anticipation of the Passion at Gethsemane and Golgotha. The Suffering Servant—and this in its turn is essential for an analysis of Christ's Passion—*takes on himself* those sufferings which were spoken of, *in a totally voluntary way*:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered that
he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth"(43).

Christ suffers voluntarily and suffers innocently. With his suffering he accepts that question which—posed by people many times—has been expressed, in a certain sense, in a radical way by the Book of Job. Christ, however, not only carries with himself the same question (and this in an even more radical way, for he is not only a man like Job but the only-begotten Son of God), but he also carries *the greatest possible answer to this question*. One can say that this answer emerges from the very master of which the question is made up. Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and the meaning of suffering not only by his teaching, that is by the Good News, but most of all by his own suffering, which is integrated with this teaching of the Good News in an

organic and indissoluble way. And this is *the final*, definitive word of this *teaching*: "the word of the Cross", as Saint Paul one day will say(44).

This "word of the Cross" completes with a definitive reality the image of the ancient prophecy. Many episodes, many discourses during Christ's public teaching bear witness to the way in which from the beginning he accepts this suffering which is the will of the Father for the salvation of the world. However, *the prayer in Gethsemane* becomes a definitive point here. The words: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt"(45), and later: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done"(46), have a manifold eloquence. They prove the truth of that love which the only-begotten Son gives to the Father in his obedience. At the same time, they attest to the truth of his suffering. The words of that prayer of Christ in Gethsemane prove *the truth of love through the truth of suffering*. Christ's words confirm with all simplicity this human truth of suffering, to its very depths: suffering is the undergoing of evil before which man shudders. He says: let it pass from me", just as Christ says in Gethsemane.

His words also attest to this unique and incomparable depth and intensity of suffering which only the man who is the only-begotten Son could experience; they attest to *that depth and intensity* which the prophetic words quoted above in their own way help us to understand. Not of course completely (for this we would have to penetrate the divine-human mystery of the subject), but at least they help us to understand that difference (and at the same time the similarity) which exists between every possible form of human suffering and the suffering of the God-man. Gethsemane is the place where precisely this suffering, in all the truth expressed by the Prophet concerning the evil experienced in it, *is revealed as it were definitively before the eyes of Christ's soul*.

After the words in Gethsemane come the words uttered on Golgotha, words which bear witness to this depth—unique in the history of the world—of the evil of the suffering experienced. When Christ says: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?", his words are not only an expression of that abandonment which many times found expression in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and in particular in that Psalm 22 [21] from which come the words quoted(47). One can say that these words on abandonment are born at the level of that inseparable union of the Son with the Father, and are born because the Father "laid on him the iniquity of us all"(48). They also foreshadow the words of Saint Paul: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin"(49). Together with this horrible weight, *encompassing the "entire" evil of the turning away from God* which is contained in sin, Christ, through the divine depth of his filial union with the Father, perceives in a humanly inexpressible way *this suffering which is the separation*, the rejection *by the Father*, the estrangement from God. But precisely through this suffering he accomplishes the Redemption, and can say as he breathes his last: "It is finished"(50).

One can also say that the Scripture has been fulfilled, that these words of the Song of the Suffering Servant have been definitively accomplished: "it was the will of the Lord to bruise him"(51). Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ. And at the same time it has entered into a completely new dimension and a new order: *it has been linked to love*, to that love of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus, to that love which creates good, drawing it out by means of suffering, just as the supreme good of the Redemption of the world was drawn from the Cross of Christ, and from that Cross constantly takes its beginning. The Cross of Christ has become a source from which flow rivers of living water(52). In it we must also pose anew the question about the meaning of suffering, and read in it, to its very depths, the answer to this question.

REFERENCES

41) Is. 53:2-6.

42) Jn. 1:29.

43) Is. 53:7-9.

44) Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18.

45) Mt. 26:39.

46) Mt. 26:42.

47) Ps. 22[21]:2.

48) Is. 53:6.

49) 2 Cor. 5:21.

50) Jn. 19:30.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 17-18 [Read aloud]

Isaiah Paints a Vivid Picture of the Suffering Christ

What did the giving of the Son to the world entail (John 3:16)? How did Christ give himself up for me (Gal 2:20)? While the four Gospel accounts of the passion fill in some of the blanks, it is perhaps the so-called “fifth Gospel” in Isaiah that provides us a more intimate look at the nature of Christ’s suffering:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered that
he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth"(Isaiah 53:7-9).

Q1. Why do you think the Pope says that in the Suffering Servant Songs of Isaiah, “the Passion of Christ becomes almost *more* expressive and touching than in the descriptions of the Evangelists themselves”?

Isaiah wrote this as if seeing the Passion with the eyes of his body *and* the eyes of his spirit. He describes vividly how the Suffering Servant will be unattractive, rejected, hated, grief-stricken, and sorrowful - and yet it is his unjust suffering that heals us of *our* unattractiveness, our rejection, our experience of hate, our grief, and our sorrow. Our savior can relate to us; he has experienced what we have - but even more so! We can never truthfully say, "God doesn't understand what I'm suffering". This very fact can be disarming and hope-inducing for our suffering patients.

Q2. What are the "eyes of the spirit" that the pope mentions (SD17)?

Q3. What consequences do we face if our spiritual eyesight is poor?

Q4. How is good spiritual eyesight essential to be a complete Catholic Health Care Professional?

"It's Not Fair!" - Christ's Suffering was Unjust

Isaiah points out an essential fact; the savior's suffering is fundamentally unjust, yet he willingly takes it upon himself. And not only is his suffering unjust, *we* are the cause of this unjust suffering through the effects of our sins - *all* of our sins. The breadth and depth of Christ's sufferings includes the entirety of human sin past, present, and future. He infinitely surpasses us in the experience of sin and suffering.

Going even further, Christ not only takes upon himself this ocean of sin, but he cancels it out! The debt of sin is stamped "paid in full"! He does this by accepting "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" (SD17). He not only annihilates sin; he brings good out of it - our redemption. Through his loving act, his suffering is redemptive. Indeed Virgil was right; "love conquers all (*omnia vincit amor*)". Love even conquers all sin, suffering, and death. His love could do it because he suffered as a man in our place, yet since he was God, he suffered in an infinite way that has infinite consequences. One man suffering could not embrace the totality of evil and therefore redeem all men, but the infinite God suffering in his humanity could embrace all sin and benefit all men.

Q5. Many of the physical sufferings of our patients are self-inflicted through poor choices (smoking, over-eating, drinking too much alcohol, abusing drugs, spending too much time in the sun or tanning beds, etc.), but many other sufferings are not self-inflicted. **What is the difference, if any, in patients' experiences of self-caused vs. Seemingly random sufferings (like a child who gets cancer)? In other words, do patients experience apparently "just suffering" and "unjust suffering" differently?**

Even though "It's Not Fair", Christ Suffers Voluntarily

Isaiah goes on to prophesy that the Suffering Servant would suffer *voluntarily* and *innocently* (Isaiah 53:7). He will carry in himself the question of Job about why the unjust suffer, and not only will he carry the question, but he will provide the greatest possible answer to this question! Christ answers the question about the meaning of suffering partially in his teaching, but he answers it fully in his own suffering. As Saint Paul says, the final definitive word of his teaching on suffering is "the word of the cross" (I Corinthians 1:18ff). He completes his spoken answers to the questions about suffering through his own suffering and death. The answer to the meaning of suffering is found on the Crucifix - Perfect Love suffering the fullness of sin to redeem all mankind. Suffering saves.

Q6. "Christ suffers voluntarily and suffers innocently". **Do you think that our suffering can have meaning even if it is not voluntary and is a result of our poor and even sinful decisions?**

Love Proved through Suffering

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ asks the Father to prevent him from suffering and dying - but only if it is the Father's will. His obedience to the Father out of love trumps his natural aversion to suffering. As Pope John Paul II wrote, "The words of that prayer of Christ in Gethsemane prove the truth of love through the truth of suffering" (SD18). Just as we want to avoid suffering, Christ wants to avoid suffering - "the undergoing of evil before which man shudders" (SD18).

Just as the words of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane reveal his suffering, so the words from the Cross the next day bear witness to the depth of that suffering, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matthew 27:46). We human beings can suffer both in body and soul. Christ did, too, and it is likely that the suffering in his human soul was more intense than the excruciating physical torture of the Crucifixion. From the moment of his conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, his human soul had known the beatific vision - intimate union with God. Now for the first time, while hanging

on the cross, that vision of God was withheld. He experienced separation from God. Is that not the essence of sin, separation and estrangement from God?

The torments of soul that Christ suffered were sufficient to save us, but he freely decided to give all he had to give. He delivered over not only his human soul to suffering but also his human body. "Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ" (SD18). Not only does human suffering reach its culmination in Christ, it also enters a new dimension, *it is linked to love*: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This love creates good by drawing out good by means of suffering. By his suffering on the Cross, Christ draws out the supreme good of the Redemption of the whole world. From the worst episode of suffering in history spring forth rivers of living waters. Only at the Cross can we read the answer to the meaning of suffering to its very depths.

Q7. Can there be love without suffering? Why or why not?

Q8. How would you explain the relationship between love and suffering? Is this relationship easier to grasp through explanations, experiences, or stories?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Four: Who immersed themselves in someone else's suffering? How did it affect you? How did it affect them?

Commitment for Lesson Five: Develop your spiritual eyesight.

Pick a person you do not like and have difficulty loving. Exercise your spiritual eyesight by trying to see the types of suffering they undergo. Try to look at life from the perspective of that person. **Write down** the types of suffering you think that person undergoes. **Look at yourself from the perspective of that person.** Write down what they see of you. **Pray for that person daily.**

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON SIX

SHARERS IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST (Part 1 of 3)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Understand what your lay priesthood means and learn how to exercise it
2. Determine to offer up your daily sufferings for the good of others
3. See how Suffering *and* Redemption, Death *and* Resurrection necessarily go together

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Luke 9:22-26) [Stand] [Read aloud]

22 [Jesus said,] “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

23 And he said to all, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: What is our Lord’s hierarchy of values, and how does it compare to your own hierarchy of values?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 19-21 (This is the basis for this lesson’s discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

19. The same Song of the Suffering Servant in the Book of Isaiah leads us, through the following verses, precisely in the direction of this question and answer:

"When he makes himself an offering for sin,
 he shall see his offspring,
 he shall prolong his days;
 the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand;
he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul
 and be satisfied;
 by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant.
make many to be accounted righteous;
 and he shall bear their iniquities.
 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
 because he poured out his soul to death,
 and was numbered with the transgressors;
 yet he bore the sin of many,
 and made intercession for the transgressors".

One can say that with the Passion of Christ all human suffering has found itself in a new situation. And it is as though Job has foreseen this when he said: "I know that my Redeemer lives ...", and as though he had directed toward it his own suffering, which without the Redemption could not have revealed to him the fullness of its meaning.

In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but *also human suffering itself has been redeemed*. Christ,—without any fault of his own—took on himself "the

total evil of sin". The experience of this evil determined the incomparable extent of Christ's suffering, which became *the price of the Redemption*. The Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah speaks of this. In later times, the witnesses of the New Covenant, sealed in the Blood of Christ, will speak of this.

These are the words of the Apostle Peter in his First Letter: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with the perishable things such as silver or gold, but *with the precious blood of Christ*, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot".

And the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Galatians will say: "He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" (56), and in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (57).

With these and similar words the witnesses of the New Covenant speak of the greatness of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering of Christ. The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has *his own share in the Redemption*. Each one is also *called to share in that suffering* through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ *has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption*. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.

20. The texts of the New Testament express this concept in many places. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle writes: "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. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus" (58).

Saint Paul speaks of various sufferings and, in particular, of those in which the first Christians became sharers "for the sake of Christ ". These sufferings enable the recipients of that Letter to share in the work of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering and death of the Redeemer. *The eloquence of the Cross and death* is, however, completed by *the eloquence of the Resurrection*. Man finds in the Resurrection a completely new light, which helps him to go forward through the thick darkness of humiliations, doubts, hopelessness and persecution. Therefore the Apostle will also write in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For *as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings*, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (59). Elsewhere he addresses to his recipients words of encouragement: "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ" (60). And in the Letter to the Romans he writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (61).

The very participation in Christ's suffering finds, in these apostolic expressions, as it were a twofold dimension. If one becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ, this happens because Christ *has opened his suffering to man*, because he himself in his redemptive suffering has become, in a certain sense, a sharer in all human sufferings. Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he *rediscovers them, through faith*, enriched with a new content and new meaning.

This discovery caused Saint Paul to write particularly strong words in the Letter to the Galatians: "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" (62). Faith enables the author of these words to know that love which led Christ to the Cross. And if he loved us in this way, suffering and dying, then with this suffering and death of his

he lives in the one whom he loved in this way; he lives in the man: in Paul. And living in him-to the degree that Paul, conscious of this through faith, responds to his love with love-Christ also becomes in a particular way *united to the man*, to Paul, *through the Cross*. This union caused Paul to write, in the same Letter to the Galatians, other words as well, no less strong: "But far be it from me to *glory* except in the *Cross* of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (63).

21. The Cross of Christ throws salvific light, in a most penetrating way, on man's life and in particular on his suffering. For through faith the Cross reaches man *together with the Resurrection*: the mystery of the Passion is contained in the Paschal Mystery. The witnesses of Christ's Passion are at the same time witnesses of his Resurrection. Paul writes: "That I may know him (Christ) and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (64). Truly, the Apostle first experienced the "power of the Resurrection" of Christ, on the road to Damascus, and only later, in this paschal light, reached that "sharing in his sufferings" of which he speaks, for example, in the Letter to the Galatians. The path of Paul is clearly paschal: *sharing in the Cross* of Christ comes about *through the experience of the Risen One*, therefore through a special sharing in the Resurrection. Thus, even in the Apostle's expressions on the subject of suffering there so often appears the motif of glory, which finds its beginning in Christ's Cross.

The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection were convinced that "through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God" (65). And Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says this: "We ourselves boast of you... for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made *worthy of the Kingdom of God*, for which you are suffering" (66). Thus to share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God. In the eyes of the just God, before his judgment, those who share in the suffering of Christ become worthy of this Kingdom. Through their sufferings, in a certain sense they repay the infinite price of the Passion and death of Christ, which became the price of our Redemption: at this price the Kingdom of God has been consolidated anew in human history, becoming the definitive prospect of man's earthly existence. Christ has led us into this Kingdom through his suffering. And also through suffering those surrounded by the mystery of Christ's Redemption *become mature* enough to enter this Kingdom.

REFERENCES

51) Is. 53:10.

52) Cf. Jn. 7:37-38.

53) Is. 53:10-12.

54) Jb. 19:25.

55) 1 Pt. 1:18-19.

56) Gal. 1:4.

57) 1 Cor. 6:20.

58) 2 Cor. 4:8-11, 14.

59) 2 Cor. 1:5.

60) 2 Thes. 3:5.

- 61) Rom. 12:1.
- 62) Gal 2:19-20.
- 63) Gal. 6:14.
- 64) Phil. 3:10-11.
- 65) Acts 14:22.
- 66) 2 Thes. 1:4-5.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 19-21

Christ Redeemed Us and Our Suffering

The question regarding the meaning of suffering is further addressed in Isaiah's Song of the Suffering Servant when he prophesies that

“he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous: and he shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:11)

Because of Christ's Passion, not only are all humans redeemed, but all human *suffering* is redeemed. Because Christ's suffering has meaning, *our* suffering has meaning. “Every man has *his own share in the Redemption*. Each one is also *called to share in that suffering* through which the Redemption was accomplished” (SD19). We are called to accept our share in the Redemption by sharing in Christ's suffering. This only seems just since it was our sins for which he suffered; now our suffering can have a redemptive effect. If Christ had not suffered, our suffering could *not* have a redemptive effect, for it is our participation in and union with Christ's suffering that renders our sufferings redemptive.

Q1. Do you ever glory in the fact that you have the raw material (in your suffering) to offer for the redemption of others? Why or why not?

We Exercise our Lay Priesthood by Offering Sacrifices

Suffering for the sake of others is one way that we exercise our lay priesthood. If you were baptized in a Catholic Church, the priest anointed your forehead with chrism and said:

“As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, *so may you* live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.”

As Catholics, we were baptized as priest, prophet, and king to share in the sacrificial, teaching, and serving offices of Christ who is the perfect and complete priest, prophet, and king. In a way, a priest's role is the reverse of a prophet's role. A prophet speaks to the people for God, while a priest speaks to God for the people.

God has given all of the baptized a priesthood to exercise - regardless of age or marital status - because the essence of priesthood is the offering of sacrifice to God on behalf of others. In the mass, the priest says “pray brethren that *your sacrifice and mine* may be acceptable to God.” The priest's sacrifice is that of Calvary, though in an unbloody manner. Our sacrifice is our entire lives - our sufferings, burdens, aspirations, gratitudes, and especially our entire wills. The priest offers all that he can - Christ's suffering and death; we offer all that we can - united to the sacrifice of the priest.

We can also exercise our priesthood outside of mass. Every time we willingly accept some form of suffering or perform a sacrifice, we can “offer it up” for an intention. Think of the great power and dignity God gives us. In our priesthood, we offer sacrifices to God for others. No difficulty, no trial, no discomfort need be wasted, because we can offer it up to God as a sacrifice for the good of someone else or an intention that we have.

Q2. Why do people often reject the cross that Christ lays upon them? For example, mother's carrying babies with Down's syndrome or Cystic Fibrosis abort over *90% of them!*

Q3. Have you ever rejected a Cross that you later regretted rejecting? If so, what happened and why did you regret it?

The Catholic Faith - The Complete Package

Suffering *and* Redemption, Death *and* Resurrection. The Catholic Faith is a “both-and” faith, not an “either-or” faith. We don't get to pick suffering *or* redemption. We don't have a choice between death *or* resurrection. We don't learn from Scripture *or* Tradition. We don't have to decide between Faith *or* Works. Suffering finds meaning in redemption; redemption comes by way of suffering. Death is overcome through resurrection; the door to our resurrection is only through death. We are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (II Corinthians 4:10).

Q4. How do we share in the power of Christ's Resurrection on earth?

Q5. What experiences have convinced you that you don't really want an easy life or that an easy life is not necessarily the best thing for you?

Knowing that suffering eventually triumphs in resurrection and redemption casts a new light on human suffering so that we can "go forward through the thick darkness of humiliations, doubts, hopelessness and persecution" (SD20). "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (II Corinthians 1:5).

Through participation in Christ sufferings, the Christian discovers the reality of Christ's redemptive suffering *for him*. He also rediscovers his own sufferings and finds that they have a new meaning in the light of Christ's sufferings for him. Christ suffers in the Christian; the Christian suffers in Christ. Christ lives in the one for whom he suffered; Christ and the Christian are united through the Cross.

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 2:19-20)

Christ's Cross sheds "salvific light" on man's suffering. The Cross cannot be separated from the Resurrection; the witnesses of Christ's Passion are also the witnesses of his Resurrection. Saint Paul shows how a Christian should desire to share Christ's sufferings so that he may share his Resurrection. The Christian never desires to suffer for the sake of suffering alone. It is by sharing in a limited degree the power of Christ's Resurrection here on earth that gives us the power to share in his sufferings. There is always a hint of glory whenever Saint Paul speaks about suffering.

That I [Paul] may know him [Christ] and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11)

Q6. What does it mean for our patients that they need to learn how to suffer with Christ?

When Paul and Barnabas were on a missionary journey, they exhorted fellow Christians by telling them “that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22); there is no easy path into Heaven. When Saint Paul commends the Thessalonians, he does so because they keep the faith through persecutions and afflictions. He tells them these are making them “worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which [they] are suffering” (I Thessalonians 1:5). We become worthy of Christ’s kingdom when we share in the sufferings of Christ. We are never so close to Christ as when we suffer with him. And through this suffering we “become mature enough to enter this Kingdom” (SD21).

Q7. As a Catholic, we should desire to be saints. French author and convert to Catholicism Charles Peguy wrote that “The only tragedy is to not be a saint”. Becoming a saint should be the highest aspiration of every Catholic; that simply means doing God’s will in all things. **Can you think of a saint who did not become a saint through suffering? Describe Saints you know who *did* become holy through suffering?**

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Five: Develop your spiritual eyesight.

What did you learn from trying to see suffering from the perspective of someone you do not like? What did you learn about how that person may view you?

Commitment for Lesson Six: Offer Up Sacrifices Throughout the Day for Others

Exercise your lay priesthood today. The next inconvenience or difficulty you encounter, accept it willingly and offer it to God for the person you know who needs God’s help the most. Write down at least one thing you offered up each day for the first week.

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help

patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON SEVEN

SHARERS IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST (Part 2 of 3)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. See how Suffering and Glory are linked
2. Learn how to respond *immediately* when you experience physical, moral, emotional, or spiritual suffering.
3. Decide how you will respond if asked to do something immoral in your work as a health care professional

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Mark 10:35-45) [Stand] [Read aloud]

35 And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." **36** And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" **37** And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." **38** But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" **39** And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I

drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; **40** but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. **42** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. **43** But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: How have you acted like James and John, and how are you called to give *your* life as a ransom for many?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 22-23a (This is the basis for this lesson’s discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

22. To the prospect of the Kingdom of God is linked hope in that glory which has its beginning in the Cross of Christ. The Resurrection revealed this glory—eschatological glory—which, in the Cross of Christ, was completely obscured by the immensity of suffering. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share in *glory*. Paul expresses this in various places. To the Romans he writes: "We are ... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us" (67). In the Second Letter to the Corinthians we read: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to things that are unseen" (68). The Apostle Peter will express this truth in the following words of his First Letter: "But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (69).

The motif of *suffering and glory* has a strictly evangelical characteristic, which becomes clear by reference to the Cross and the Resurrection. The Resurrection became, first of all, the manifestation of glory, which corresponds to Christ's being lifted up through the Cross. If, in fact, the Cross was to human eyes Christ's *emptying of himself*, at the same time it was in the eyes of God *his being lifted up*. On the Cross, Christ attained and fully accomplished his mission: by fulfilling the will of the Father, he at the same time fully realized himself. In weakness he manifested his *power*, and in humiliation he manifested all *his messianic greatness*. Are not all the words he uttered during his agony on Golgotha a proof of this greatness, and especially his words concerning the perpetrators of his crucifixion: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (70)? To those who share in Christ's sufferings these words present themselves with the power of a supreme example. Suffering is also an invitation to manifest the moral greatness of man, his *spiritual maturity*. Proof of this has been given, down through the generations, by the martyrs and

confessors of Christ, faithful to the words: "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul." (71)

Christ's Resurrection has revealed "the glory of the future age" and, at the same time, has confirmed "the boast of the Cross": the *glory that is hidden in the very suffering of Christ* and which has been and is often mirrored in human suffering, as an expression of man's spiritual greatness. This glory must be acknowledged not only in the martyrs for the faith but in many others also who, at times, even without belief in Christ, suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause. In the sufferings of all of these people the great dignity of man is strikingly confirmed.

23. Suffering, in fact, is always a *trial*—at times a very hard one—to which humanity is subjected. The gospel *paradox of weakness and strength* often speaks to us from the pages of the Letters of Saint Paul, a paradox particularly experienced by the Apostle himself and together with him experienced by all who share Christ's sufferings. Paul writes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (72). In the Second Letter to Timothy we read: "And therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed" (73). And in the Letter to the Philippians he will even say: "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me*" (74).

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this *weakness* there is accomplished his *lifting up*, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, *to suffer* means to become particularly *susceptible*, particularly *open to the working of the salvific powers of God*, offered to humanity in Christ. In him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self. This also explains the exhortation in the First Letter of Peter: "Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God" (75).

REFERENCES

67) Rom. 8:17-18.

68) 2 Cor. 4:17-18.

69) 1 Pt. 4:13.

70) Lk. 23:34.

71) Mt. 10:28.

72) 2 Cor. 12:9.

73) 2 T m. 1:12.

74) Phil. 4:13.

75) 1 Pt. 4:16.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 22-23a

Suffering - and Glory, too!

The Kingdom of God for which we strive promises a glory that has its beginning in the Cross of Christ. This glory is the manifestation of God's beauty - to the extent that we can behold it; this glory is also the realization of the full beauty and magnificence that we have cooperated with Christ to achieve in ourselves. God does not only call us to suffer with him, he calls us to suffer *so that* we may be glorified with him. Saint Paul describes our earthly sufferings as a "slight momentary affliction" that will gain us "an eternal weight of glory" (II Corinthians 4:17). It's really not fair; we don't deserve "an eternal weight of glory", but it is ours if we unite our sufferings with Christ. Because of this great promise, Saint Peter tells us to "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 4:13).

Anglican writer and apologist C.S. Lewis penned a sermon called the "Weight of Glory". While we know the experience of suffering, we don't have a good handle on *glory*. In the last paragraph of Lewis' sermon, he gives us a glimpse of what this glory is.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Q1. In what circumstances do you tend to think of the "glory yet to be revealed"? That is, *when* do you think most about heaven, and *what* do you think about it?

When I am Weak, He is Strong

Saint Paul complained three times to God about a messenger of Satan that harassed him. God refused to remove this suffering from Paul when he replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). This may seem harsh, but it is exactly how God the Father responded when God

the Son asked to be relieved of his suffering. Though it is a paradox, it is a heavenly paradox. On the Cross, Christ was supremely weak; he was also lifted up as the King reigning before all space and time. This “lifting up” on the Cross was also a promise of his definitive “lifting up” in his Resurrection.

In his first encyclical, Pope Francis explores the relationship between faith, weakness, and suffering; faith brings light to the one who suffers.

Writing to the Christians of Corinth about his sufferings and tribulations, Saint Paul links his faith to his preaching of the Gospel. In himself he sees fulfilled the passage of scripture which reads: “I believed, and so I spoke “ (2 Cor 4:13). The reference is to a verse of Psalm 116, in which the psalmist exclaims: “I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted’” (v. 10). **To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing, yet it is precisely in such testing that Paul sees the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel, for it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God’s power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering.** The apostle himself experienced a dying which would become life for Christians (cf. 2 Cor 4:7-12). In the hour of trial faith brings light, while suffering and weakness make it evident that “we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor 4:5)” (*Lumen Fidei* 56).

Q2. Describe a time you were able to rejoice in your sufferings, even though God did not remove them from you?

In his supreme weakness, he became fully himself and demonstrated his greatness by fulfilling the will of the Father. We are asked to do no less. We become even more like Christ when we pray for those who make us suffer by saying, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.” Our human suffering reveals our greatness. Suffering may *make* the man, but more specially, suffering *reveals* the man and his spiritual maturity. Even those who do not know Christ suffer in union with him when they “suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause” (SD22).

Q3. Describe an example where you saw “suffering reveal the man”. In other words, where did you see a person suffer that enabled him/her to bring to the surface his/her character that was otherwise hidden?

Advice on how to Suffer

When we suffer, we can pray with Saint Paul, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13), or we can say with Job, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). When we admit our weakness amidst our sufferings, we give God space to act with his strength - in his way and in his time. In this space, our sufferings can be “infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ’s Cross” (SD23). In such sufferings, we become vulnerable, susceptible, and open to God’s saving power within us. It is an essential part of the economy of God that he works *especially* through suffering and in human weakness. “Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God” (1 Peter 4:16).

Q4. When you experience misfortune, frustration, or other types of suffering, do you have an immediate response that you say to yourself or to God? If so, what is it and how does it help you?

Examples include:

“The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

“It’s all gonna burn.”

“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”

Q5. Describe a patient you have witnessed rejoice in his or her sufferings?

And Now for Something Personal

We have come to an aspect of suffering that may apply to health care professionals more than to our patients. In the current medical culture, more and more physicians, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and others are being asked to act against a Catholic conscience. When we are asked or prodded to assist with abortions, sterilizations, contraceptive dispensing or insertion, *in vitro* fertilization, withholding of nutrition or hydration, excessive dosing of narcotics, assistance with “passive euthanasia” in the neonatal intensive care unit, active euthanasia of the “old and unproductive”, or even illegal billing and coding practices, we are being asked to turn away from what is good and right. We are being asked to turn our backs on God. No matter how we respond, we suffer. If we respond in favor of human dignity, we glorify God; if we respond in a way that denigrates human dignity, we glorify evil. In our weakness and inability to change or overcome the Culture of Death, we give God space to work when we decline to participate in such works of evil.

Dr. Jerome Lejeune - Facing Off the Culture of Death

Dr. Jerome Lejeune, the French geneticist who was the first man to discover the cause of a genetic disease, was unashamedly pro-life. After he discovered that Down's Syndrome was caused by an extra 21st chromosome (trisomy 21), he worried that others would target his "little patients" in the womb for being imperfect. In 1969 he traveled to San Francisco to receive the William Allen Memorial Award, the highest award that could be conferred on a geneticist. He knew that his discovery was on the verge of being approved to diagnose Down's syndrome children *in utero* so that they could be destroyed.

In his acceptance speech, he condemned abortion by saying

"The temptation to kill by abortion these small people afflicted with disease is contrary to moral law; and genetics confirms this conclusion. This moral law is not arbitrary."

Not a single person in the audience clapped; he was met with hostile and annoyed silence. He had met the elite of his profession head-on without concern for human respect. Later that day, he wrote to his wife, "Today, I lost my Nobel Prize in Medicine." Dr. Lejeune would not support the evil of abortion or even remain silent before it. He would not abandon his "little patients" for the sake of fleeting human notoriety.

Q6. How do stories like that of Dr. Lejeune help prepare you to respond if you are asked do something immoral in a health care setting?

Q7. How does being part of a Catholic Medical Guild prepare you to respond to requests or pressure to allow, assist, or perform immoral procedures or actions?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Six: Offer Up Sacrifices Throughout the Day for Others

Did you become more aware of offering up your sufferings? What kind of sacrifices did you offer up for others? What effect did this have on you?

Commitment for Lesson Seven: Responding immediately to suffering

When something inconvenient, painful, or unexpectedly bad happens to you, how do you usually respond? If you would like to respond more like Christ, decide on

something that you will do *immediately* (or as soon as you realize you are not responding in a Christian manner). Some suggestions follow, but you should choose something that has meaning for you. Once you have chosen this, practice it regularly and write down the first five times you have occasion to use it.

“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

“I am a pencil in the hand of God.”

“I offer this pain for the soul most in need of your mercy, Lord.”

“Lord I believe, help my unbelief.”

“Guardian Angel, help me offer this pain to our Lord”

“Mary, my Mother, help me”

“I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me”

“Lord, I offer this suffering for _____”

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON EIGHT

SHARERS IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST (Part 3 of 3)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Learn what the virtue of hope is
2. Gain a deeper understanding of what it means to complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ
3. Decide what you ultimately hope for in life

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Matthew 11:25-30) [Stand] [Read aloud]

25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; **26** yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. **27** All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. **28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** 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. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: All Christians are called to suffer, yet Christ says the “My yoke is easy and my burden is light”. How do you reconcile those two facts?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 23b-24 (This is the basis for this lesson’s discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

23b. In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul deals still more fully with the theme of this "birth of power in weakness", this *spiritual tempering* of man in the midst of trials and tribulations, which is the particular vocation of those who share in Christ's sufferings. "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 which has been given to us" (76). Suffering as it were contains a special *call to the virtue* which man must exercise on his own part. And this is the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs and causes harm. In doing this, the individual unleashes hope, which maintains in him the conviction that suffering will not get the better of him, that it will not deprive him of his dignity as a human being, a dignity linked to awareness of the meaning of life. And indeed this meaning makes itself known together with *the working of God's love*, which is the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit. The more he shares in this love, man rediscovers himself more and more fully in suffering: he rediscovers the "soul" which he thought he had "lost" (77) because of suffering.

24. Nevertheless, the Apostle's experiences as a sharer in the sufferings of Christ go even further. In the Letter to the Colossians we read the words which constitute as it were the final stage of the spiritual journey in relation to suffering: "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" (78). And in another Letter he asks his readers: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (79).

In the Paschal Mystery Christ began *the union with man in the community of the Church*. The mystery of the Church is expressed in this: that already in the act of Baptism, which brings about a configuration with Christ, and then through his Sacrifice—sacramentally through the Eucharist—the Church is continually being built up spiritually as the Body of Christ. In this Body, Christ wishes to be united with every individual, and in a special way he is united with those who suffer. The words quoted above from the Letter to the Colossians bear witness to the exceptional nature of this union. For, *whoever suffers in union with Christ*— just as the Apostle Paul bears his "tribulations" in union with Christ— not only

receives from Christ that strength already referred to but also "completes" by his suffering "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". This evangelical outlook especially highlights the truth *concerning the creative character of suffering*. The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings—in any part of the world and at any time in history—to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.

Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, *remains always open to all love* expressed in *human suffering*. In this dimension—the dimension of love—the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished. Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time he did not bring it to a close. In this redemptive suffering, through which the Redemption of the world was accomplished, Christ opened himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. Yes, it seems to be part *of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering* that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed.

Thus, with this openness to every human suffering, Christ has accomplished the world's Redemption through his own suffering. For, at the same time, this Redemption, even though it was completely achieved by Christ's suffering, lives on and in its own special way develops in the history of man. It lives and develops as the body of Christ, the Church, and in this dimension every human suffering, by reason of the loving union with Christ, completes the suffering of Christ. It completes that suffering *just as the Church completes the redemptive work of Christ*. The mystery of the Church—that body which completes in itself also Christ's crucified and risen body—indicates at the same time the space or context in which human sufferings complete the sufferings of Christ. Only within this radius and dimension of the Church as the Body of Christ, which continually develops in space and time, can one think and speak of "what is lacking" in the sufferings of Christ. The Apostle, in fact, makes this clear when he writes of "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church".

It is precisely *the Church*, which ceaselessly draws on the infinite resources of the Redemption, introducing it into the life of humanity, *which is the dimension* in which the redemptive suffering of Christ can be constantly completed by the suffering of man. This also highlights the divine and human nature of the Church. Suffering seems in some way to share in the characteristics of this nature. And for this reason suffering also has a special value in the eyes of the Church. It is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the Redemption. She likewise bows down with all the depth of that faith with which she embraces within herself the inexpressible mystery of the Body of Christ.

REFERENCES

76) Rom. 5:3-5.

77) Cf. Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24; Jn. 12:25.

78) Col. 1:24.

79) 1 Cor. 6:15.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 23b-24

Suffering Transformed into Hope

Saint Paul describes in his letter to the Romans that the particular vocation of one who suffers with Christ is to be spiritually tempered through trials and tribulations. *Tempering* implies that the strength and elasticity of our soul grows. How?

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 which has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

Suffering calls us to persevere in virtue by bearing patiently “whatever disturbs and causes harm” (SD23). As Paul says, this perseverance results in a hope that both helps man maintain his human dignity and gives him confidence that suffering will not defeat him. This transformation of suffering into hope is only possible because God pours his love out to all, and if we accept this love, then we rediscover more deeply who we are within our suffering.

Q1. How have you seen a patient rediscover himself through suffering?

Q2. How have you rediscovered yourself through suffering?

The Nature of Hope

On November 30, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi* (SS), or *Saved in Hope*. Benedict points out something essential for our suffering patients: hope makes a difference *today*.

“*One who has hope lives differently*; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life” because “Christians, unlike others, have a sure future . . . it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness” (SS 2).

The most important hope is concerned with what happens after death. “The realization that there is One who even in death accompanies me, and with his ‘rod and

his staff comforts me', so that 'I fear no evil' - this was the new 'hope' that arose over the life of believers (SS 6)."

Hope is necessary, because we cannot know what happens after death unless someone on the other side of death reveals it to us. If we did not die, we would also need hope, because we long for something on earth that is never fulfilled. There is always something that is "not fair", and we know that it needs to be set aright. The Benedict realizes that we fight this inner turmoil; he knows that we do not want to die while knowing that true and full satisfaction is not available here on earth. We don't really know what we want.

" . . . it is true that to eliminate death or to postpone it more or less indefinitely would place the earth and humanity in an impossible situation, and even for the individual would bring no benefit On the one hand, we do not want to die; above all, those who love us do not want us to die. Yet on the other hand, neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view. So what do we really want? (SS 11) In some way we want life itself, true life, untouched even by death; yet at the same time we do not know the thing towards which we feel driven. We cannot stop reaching out for it, and yet we know that all we can experience or accomplish is not what we yearn for. This unknown 'thing' is the true 'hope' which drives us." (SS 12)

Q3. Do you agree that unending life on earth would be unendurable? Why?

Q4. Are there people who seek life everlasting on earth? Why?

Q5. What *do* we and our patients really want out of life?

Reaching the Pinnacle of the Christian Life on Earth - Joy in Suffering

We now come to the mysterious pinnacle of a Christian's experience of suffering as described by Saint Paul

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)

To help understand this passage, Paul reminds us that our "bodies are members of Christ" (I Corinthians 6:15). So what does it mean to "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of . . . the church"?

First, as a result of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, man is now united with Christ through Baptism: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3).

Second, by receiving the Eucharist, we receive the creative power of his Sacrifice on the Cross so that we are spiritually built up as members of Christ.

Third, *nothing* can be added to Christ's suffering for the sake of human redemption. His Redemption of us is complete, inexhaustible, and infinite.

The Meaning of that Mysterious Verse - Christ Wants to Suffer in Our Bodies

Finally, when Christ suffered, died, and rose from the dead he did so only in his own body that was the fruit of the womb of the Virgin Mary. Now that he is united to us, he wants to suffer ***in each of our bodies*** - the members of his mystical body. When any person shares in Christ's sufferings at any time in history or place in the world, "he in his own way completes the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world" (SD24).

Even though the Redemption is complete, it is still being accomplished. "Yes, it seems to be part of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed" (SD24).

Q6. "Sufferings will be sweet and pleasant to us while we are with Him; and the greatest pleasures will be, without Him, a cruel punishment to us" (Brother Lawrence). **How do we suffer *with* Christ? How do we suffer apart from Christ?**

When a child is conceived, the DNA that determines the structure and function of that new person is complete; nothing more can be added to it. Yet, the destiny and life of that child has yet to be lived out in space and time. In a similar way, the Redemption was completed on the Cross, and no man can add anything to its infinite value. Yet, the Redemption must be applied and lived out in all the members of Christ's Church throughout history and across the world.

The Church completes the redemptive work of Christ through her sacraments, liturgy, and teaching. Without the Church to apply the merits of Christ's suffering, fewer persons would receive the benefits of redemption. "This is why the Church's mission is universal: its work in extending the saving work of Christ is for the sake of the entire world, not simply for those who profess Catholic faith."

The Church is completed through Christ suffering in his individual human members. The divine and human natures of the Church are united in suffering, and therefore, suffering has special value in the eyes of the Church. The suffering of the Church's members completes the work of Redemption in the Church. The Redemption is complete - past, present, and future. Christ completed the work of Redemption through his suffering, death, and resurrection. The work of Redemption is being completed now through preaching and teaching as individuals accept and embrace the redemption offered to them, and the work of Redemption will not come to a close until the end of time.

Christ gives us the *dignity of causality* as members of his Church. We can apply our sufferings, united to Christ, for the good of our own redemption and the redemption of others. This is the origin of that ancient Catholic admonition, "Offer it up".

Q5. "This evangelical outlook especially highlights the truth concerning the creative character of suffering. The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption" (SD24). **Have you ever thought of sufferings as creative before? What do you think the Pope means when he says that suffering is creative?**

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Seven: Respond Immediately to Suffering

What immediate response to suffering did you choose? What was the effect of using it during the last several weeks?

Commitment for Lesson Eight: Determine Your Ultimate Bucket List

There is great cultural discussion about "bucket lists"; what do we want to do before we "kick the bucket". Re-read the excerpt from *Spe Salvi* before question 3. Note Pope Benedict's question, "So what do we really want?" What *do* you really want in life? When you are on your death-bed or when you are in front of Christ at your own personal judgment, what will you wish had been on your bucket list? What will you wish you had accomplished during your life?

Write out your bucket list. Include those things that will matter when you are on your death-bed or before Christ at your final judgment.

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON NINE

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING (Part 1 of 2)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. See how Christianity's understanding of suffering is unique among world religions and philosophies
2. Learn what it means that Mary is a Co-redeemer with Christ
3. Decide to beg Mary to show you how to suffer with Christ so that your soul may be strengthened, renewed, and matured

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Luke 21:10-19) [Stand] [Read aloud]

10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; **11** there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. **12** But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. **13** This will be a time for you to bear testimony. **14** Settle it

therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer;**15** for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.**16** You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; **17** you will be hated by all for my name's sake. **18** But not a hair of your head will perish. **19** By your endurance you will gain your lives.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: What does it mean to you that a mark of being Jesus' follower is that "you will be hated by all for [Jesus'] name's sake"?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 25-26a (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

25. The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ have handed on to the Church and to mankind a specific Gospel of suffering. The Redeemer himself wrote this Gospel, above all by his own suffering accepted in love, so that man "should not perish but have eternal life" (80). This suffering, together with the living word of his teaching, became a rich source for all those who shared in Jesus' sufferings among the first generation of his disciples and confessors and among those who have come after them down the centuries.

It is especially consoling to note—and also accurate in accordance with the Gospel and history—that at the side of Christ, in the first and most exalted place, there is always his Mother through the exemplary testimony that she bears *by her whole life* to this particular Gospel of suffering. In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that they were not only a proof of her unshakeable faith but also a contribution to the redemption of all. In reality, from the time of her secret conversation with the angel, she began to see in her mission as a mother her "destiny" to share, in a singular and unrepeatable way, in the very mission of her Son. And she very soon received a confirmation of this in the events that accompanied the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and in the solemn words of the aged Simeon, when he spoke of a sharp sword that would pierce her heart. Yet a further confirmation was in the anxieties and privations of the hurried flight into Egypt, caused by the cruel decision of Herod.

And again, after the events of her Son's hidden and public life, events which she must have shared with acute sensitivity, it was on Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world. Her ascent of Calvary and her standing at the foot of the Cross together with the Beloved Disciple were a special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her Son. And the words which she heard from his lips were a kind of solemn handing-over of this Gospel of suffering so that it could be proclaimed to the whole community of believers.

As a witness *to* her Son's Passion by her *presence*, and as a sharer in it by her *compassion*, Mary offered a unique contribution to the Gospel of suffering, by embodying in anticipation the

expression of Saint Paul which was quoted at the beginning. She truly has a special title to be able to claim that she "completes in her flesh"—as already in her heart—"what is lacking in Christ's afflictions".

In the light of the unmatched example of Christ, reflected with singular clarity in the life of his Mother, the Gospel of suffering, through the experience and words of the Apostles, becomes *an inexhaustible source for the ever new generations* that succeed one another in the history of the Church. The Gospel of suffering signifies not only the presence of suffering in the Gospel, as one of the themes of the Good News, but also the revelation *of the salvific power and salvific significance* of suffering in Christ's messianic mission and, subsequently, in the mission and vocation of the Church.

Christ *did not conceal* from his listeners *the need for suffering*. He said very clearly: "If any man would come after me... let him take up his cross daily" (81), and before his disciples he placed demands of a moral nature that can only be fulfilled on condition that they should "deny themselves" (82). The way that leads to the Kingdom of heaven is "hard and narrow", and Christ contrasts it to the "wide and easy" way that "leads to destruction" (83). On various occasions Christ also said that his disciples and confessors would *meet with much persecution*, something which—as we know—happened not only in the first centuries of the Church's life under the Roman Empire, but also came true in various historical periods and in other parts of the world, and still does even in our own time.

Here are some of Christ's statements on this subject: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you *to bear testimony*. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all *for my name's sake*. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives" (84).

The Gospel of suffering speaks first in various places of suffering "for Christ", "for the sake of Christ", and it does so with the words of Jesus himself or the words of his Apostles. The Master does not conceal the prospect of suffering from his disciples and followers. On the contrary, he reveals it with all frankness, indicating at the same time the supernatural assistance that will accompany them in the midst of persecutions and tribulations "for his name's sake". These persecutions and tribulations will also be, as it were, a *particular proof* of likeness to Christ and union with him. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you...; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me they will persecute you... But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me" (85). "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" (86).

This first chapter of the Gospel of suffering, which speaks of persecutions, namely of tribulations experienced because of Christ, contains in itself *a special call to courage and fortitude*, sustained by the eloquence of the Resurrection. Christ has overcome the world definitively by his Resurrection. Yet, because of the relationship between the Resurrection and his Passion and death, he has at the same time overcome the world by his suffering. Yes, suffering has been singularly present in that victory over the world which was manifested in the Resurrection. Christ retains in his risen body the marks of the wounds of the Cross in his hands, feet and side. Through the Resurrection, he manifests *the victorious power of suffering*, and he wishes to imbue with the conviction of this power the hearts of

those whom he chose as Apostles and those whom he continually chooses and sends forth. The Apostle Paul will say: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (87).

26. While the first great chapter of the Gospel of suffering is written down, as the generations pass, by those who suffer persecutions for Christ's sake, simultaneously another great chapter of this Gospel unfolds through the course of history. This chapter is written by all those *who suffer together with Christ*, uniting their human sufferings to his salvific suffering. In these people there is fulfilled what the first witnesses of the Passion and Resurrection said and wrote about sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Therefore in those people there is fulfilled the Gospel of suffering, and, at the same time, each of them continues in a certain sense to write it: they write it and proclaim it to the world, they announce it to the world in which they live and to the people of their time.

Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that *in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ*, a special grace. To this grace many saints, such as 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 that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of *his entire life and vocation*. This discovery is a particular confirmation of the spiritual greatness which in man surpasses the body in a way that is completely beyond compare. When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior *maturity and spiritual greatness* become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal.

REFERENCES

80) Jn. 3:16.

81) Lk. 9:23.

82) Cf. *ibid.*

83) Cf. Mt. 7:13-14.

84) Lk. 21:12-19.

85) Jn. 15:18-21.

86) Jn. 16:33.

87) 2 Tm. 3:12.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS 25-26a*

Sufferings is Good News?

No philosophy or theology besides Christianity exalts suffering. This is not because suffering is good in itself; it is because through suffering we are definitively redeemed and can become like Christ. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Pope John Paul titles Section VI *The Gospel of Suffering*. Gospel means "Good News", and suffering is indeed good news when seen as part of the whole Christian message.

Mary, the Most Excellent Disciple of the Suffering Christ

The Gospel of suffering, though contained within the New Testament, was essentially written by Christ as he accepted his own suffering “in love, so that man should not perish but have eternal life” (SD25). The most excellent disciple who lived the Gospel of suffering is his Mother. At the Presentation in the Temple, Simeon prophesied not only that Christ would save us, but that a sword would pierce his mother’s soul. Suffering was an integral part of the life of the Holy Family experienced in a unique way by Mary - her experience of ill treatment and misunderstanding surrounding the conception of Jesus, the painful trip to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus away from family, friends, and comforts, the hurried flight to Egypt and early years there, and the fear that Herod would destroy her son.

Q1. How can we hold up Mary to our patients, especially to females, as an example of how to bear sufferings?

Mary, Co-reedeemer

Mary’s suffering continued throughout her life and reached its zenith on Calvary where its unimaginable intensity in some mysterious and supernatural way contributed to the redemption of the world. One of Mary’s titles is “Co-Redemptrix”, and this title takes away nothing from the all-sufficient, superabundant Redemption wrought by her Son. However, she is a “co-redeemer” with Christ in a way no one else can be. No one lived as intimately with Christ; no one suffered as much with Christ; no one else perfectly followed Christ. By virtue of her intense union with him she suffered what he suffered, and he suffered what she suffered. She continues to intercede for the Church today as Queen of Heaven (Revelation 12).

On Calvary, Christ gave his Mother to the Church (as represented by John) to continue to mediate the Good News of the Gospel of Suffering to her members. The Blessed Virgin Mary not only witnessed her Son’s Passion by her presence, but she also shared in it through her compassion. Note that “compassion” derives from two Latin words meaning “to suffer together”. No one else completed in her flesh so well “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”

Q2. How does knowing that “compassion” means to “suffer together” change your understanding of what compassion is?

Suffering is Essential and Saves Souls

The Gospel of Suffering signifies two important realities for all generations of Christians. First, suffering is an indispensable part and essential theme of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, suffering has the power to save souls, and it is imperative to preach, teach, and apply the salvific power of suffering in the ongoing mission and vocation of the Church so that all who are called to the Kingdom may embrace the Redemption wrought in the forge of Christ's suffering.

Christ never promised his followers an easy life; he was blatantly up front with them. GK Chesterton expressed this reality in his inimitable way when he said that

Jesus promised the disciples three things - that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble.

The way to Heaven is "hard and narrow" and we each must "take up our cross". He promised persecution, "constant trouble", to his followers. That persecution continues today in our own country and throughout the world. The same Savior who said, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30) also said, "they will lay their hands on you and persecute you . . . you will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12, 17). If we are to follow Christ, we will suffer.

Q3. "If you bear the cross unwillingly, you make it a burden, and load yourself more heavily; but you must bear it" (Thomas a Kempis). **What does it mean to "take up our Cross daily and follow Christ"?**

But we need to also remember that those who do not follow Christ also suffer! No one escapes suffering. Buddhism addresses the inescapable aspect of suffering front-and-center in its philosophy. Like Christianity, it sees love and suffering as inextricably linked. But whereas the "both-and" nature of the Church embraces love and suffering together, Buddhism throws out the baby with the bathwater; it seeks to eliminate suffering by eliminating love. Buddhism teaches that if we do not love anything (become attached to it), then we cannot suffer. The Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, appeared to flirt with aspects of Buddhism near the end of his life, but he demonstrated his firm belief in the Gospel of Suffering when he wrote this very non-Buddhist reflection in his autobiography:

The truth that many people never understand until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt.

Playwright Tennessee Williams commented on the inevitability and inescapability of suffering when he pithily wrote:

Don't look forward to the day you stop suffering, because when it comes you'll know you're dead.

And the French novelist, Marcel Proust realized the foolishness of trying to escape suffering when he penned:

“We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full” (*Grief and Oblivion*, Chapter 1).

Q4. What strikes you personally from the above quotes?

Peace Amidst Suffering - Christ Suffers with Us

The Gospel of Suffering promises that we can be completely fearless amidst our suffering because Christ will accompany us in the “midst of persecutions and tribulations for his name’s sake” (SD25) and give us peace because he has overcome the world. He overcame the world through his suffering, and he still displays this victorious power of suffering in his Resurrected body that bears the marks of the Crucifixion in his hands, feet, and side.

Q5. Why and how is it significant that Christ maintains the marks of his Crucifixion in his resurrected body, and how does this relate to the reliable presence of a Crucifix in the patient rooms of Catholic hospitals?

As Christians we can suffer *for* Christ and we can suffer *with* Christ. When we are persecuted for identifying ourselves as Christians and acting like Christians amidst the Culture of Death, we as medical professionals suffer *for the sake of Christ*. When we see our patients suffer, or when we ourselves become patients, we witness or experience suffering *together with Christ*. This part of the Gospel of Suffering continues to be written by all those who unite their sufferings with the salvific suffering of Christ.

Q6. How do we unite *our* sufferings to the sufferings of Christ?

Q7. How do we *teach others* to unite their sufferings to Christ?

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have discovered that within the pain of suffering, there is a power that draws them closer to Christ. As they are drawn closer to him, they become entirely new persons who discover a new dimension to life; and the more that suffering diminishes the body, the greater their spiritual greatness and maturity manifests itself. With suffering, the body may wither away, but the soul becomes renewed, strengthened, and matured.

Q8. How do Christ's followers suffer today simply for following him, and how are they renewed through their suffering?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Eight: Determine Your Ultimate Bucket List

What is on *your* ultimate bucket list?

Commitment for Lesson Nine: Beg Mary to Teach you to Suffer with Christ

Each morning and evening, pray the *Memorare* and ask Our Lady to teach you how to suffer with Christ so that no suffering is wasted and so that your soul is renewed, strengthened, and matured

**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 with this confidence,
I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of Virgins my Mother;
To thee 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.**

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON TEN

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING (Part 2 of 2)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Learn that God answers our questions about suffering experientially instead of directly with words
2. Develop more ways to respond to your patients tough questions about suffering
3. Decide to ask God your "tough questions" while gazing at him on a Crucifix

GOSPEL REFLECTION (John 19:25b-27) [Stand] [Read aloud]

25b Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" **27** Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: Why do you think there were more women than men at the Cross? What do you think Mary experienced at the foot of the Cross?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 26b-27 (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

26b. This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the *result* of a particular *conversion* and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. It is he himself who acts at the heart of human sufferings through his Spirit of truth, through the consoling Spirit. It is he who transforms, in a certain sense, the very substance of the spiritual life, indicating for the person who suffers a place close to himself. *It is he*—as the interior Master and Guide—*who reveals* to the suffering brother and sister this *wonderful interchange*, situated at the very heart of the mystery of the Redemption. Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation. By his suffering on the Cross, Christ reached the very roots of evil, of sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the Creator. To the suffering brother or sister Christ *discloses* and gradually reveals *the horizons of the Kingdom of God*: the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world being built on the saving power of love. And slowly but effectively, Christ leads into this world, into this Kingdom of the Father, suffering man, in a certain sense through the very heart of his suffering. For suffering cannot be *transformed* and changed by a 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.

This is not all: the Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed. As though by a continuation of that motherhood which by the power of the Holy Spirit had given him life, the dying Christ conferred upon the ever Virgin Mary a *new kind of motherhood*—spiritual and universal—toward all human beings, so that every individual, during the pilgrimage of faith, might remain, together with her, closely united to him unto the Cross, and so that every form of suffering, given fresh life by the power of this Cross, should become no longer the weakness of man but the power of God.

However, this interior process does not always follow the same pattern. It often begins and is set in motion with great difficulty. Even the very point of departure differs: people react to suffering in different ways. But in general it can be said that almost always the individual enters suffering with a *typically human protest* and *with the question "why"*. He asks the meaning of his suffering and seeks an answer to this question on the human level. Certainly he often puts this question to God, and to Christ. Furthermore, he cannot help noticing that the one to whom he puts the question is

himself suffering and wishes *to answer him* from the Cross, *from the heart of his own suffering*. Nevertheless, it often takes time, even a long time, for this answer to begin to be interiorly perceived. For Christ does not answer directly and he does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ.

The answer which comes through this sharing, by way of the interior encounter with the Master, is in itself *something more than the mere abstract answer* to the question about the meaning of suffering. For it is above all a call. It is a vocation. Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else he says: "Follow me!". Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my Cross. Gradually, *as the individual takes up his cross*, spiritually uniting himself to the Cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. 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.

27. Saint Paul speaks of such joy in the Letter to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (88). A source of joy is found in the *overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering*, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ *transforms* this depressing *feeling*. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"; the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption *he is serving*, like Christ, *the salvation of his brothers and sisters*. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that *is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things* which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption. In that "cosmic" struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil, spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians (89), human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, *constitute a special support for the powers of good*, and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers.

And so the Church sees in all Christ's suffering brothers and sisters as it were a *multiple subject of his supernatural power*. How often is it precisely to them that the pastors of the Church appeal, and precisely from them that they seek help and support! The Gospel of suffering is being written unceasingly, and it speaks unceasingly with the words of this strange paradox: the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special *particle of the infinite treasure* of the world's Redemption, and can share this treasure with others. The more a person is threatened by sin, the heavier the structures of sin which today's world brings with it, the greater is the eloquence which human suffering possesses in itself. And the more the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world.

REFERENCES

88) Col. 1:24.

89) Cf. Eph. 6:12.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 26b-27

Christ Operates from the Inside

Spiritual greatness and maturity in suffering are the fruit of cooperating with the grace of Christ. This grace penetrates us from the inside; no one can give it to us from the outside. The sufferer must willingly unite his suffering or give his suffering to Christ so that Christ can act from within us. He can then take our suffering, a true experience of evil, and turn it into the greatest good - eternal salvation and the transformation of our souls and the souls of others. He has also given us his Mother through whom he wishes to penetrate the heart of every sufferer. For some patients, turning to Mary in their suffering may be easier or more natural than turning to Christ. But in turning to Mary, they give themselves to her who only brings souls to her Son.

Q1. How have you experienced Mary as your Mother?

Q2. How can you introduce Mary to others as their Mother?

How does God answer our question about the meaning of suffering?

On paper, the transformation of suffering into salvation may sound reasonable and straightforward. For those of us who are mathematically minded, we could represent this relationship by writing the word “suffering” on the left, writing “salvation” to the right, and inserting an arrow pointing from “suffering” to “salvation” that has the words “Christ’s grace” above the arrow.

In reality, the interior process that yields fruit from suffering begins only with great difficulty and usually with the question “Why?”. When this question is posed to other humans, certain true answers can be given, but they are never completely satisfying. When patients pose this question to God, they eventually notice that the one they are questioning is also suffering on the Cross, and it is from the Cross that God answers. But this answer is not direct and rational. God’s answer is experiential as he and each patient suffer together. In this “compassion”, or suffering together, of God and man, “man hears Christ’s saving answer” (SD26). The best thing that we may be able to do for some of our suffering patients is to have them gaze upon the Crucifix. No wonder Crucifixes adorn the walls of patient rooms in Catholic hospitals.

Q3. How does the Cross differ from the Crucifix? Which would you rather have on your wall during a time of suffering? Why?

Q4. How can we encourage suffering patients when we see them make an effort to find meaning in their suffering and use it for their own good or the good of others?

When Christ answers our “Why?” of suffering, he does not give reasons; he issues a call that says “Follow me! Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering!” (SD26). The more we take up our cross and unite ourselves to Christ on his Cross, the more Christ reveals to us the meaning of suffering. We only find the answer to the meaning of suffering in our response to that suffering, and in that, we can discover peace and even joy.

Q5. Why do you think that God does not give us a direct, rational answer to our questions about suffering and instead calls us to find the answer in following him on the path of suffering?

Q6. Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese political dissident, democracy supporter, and Buddhist proclaimed in her 1991 Nobel Prize acceptance speech that “Wherever suffering is ignored, there will be the seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades, embitters and enrages.” Yet some people are ennobled, not enraged and embittered, through suffering. It seems that suffering can make someone *better* or *bitter*. **Why do you think one sufferer becomes *better* while another becomes *bitter* as a result of suffering?**

How do we find joy in suffering?

We now return to the first part of that mysterious saying of Saint Paul (Colossians 1:24), “Now I *rejoice* in my sufferings for your sake”. He doesn’t only endure or tolerate his sufferings, he *rejoices* in them! This must be supernatural, because no man can rejoice in sufferings at a natural level. But since grace builds on nature, there must be a natural basis for the ability to rejoice in sufferings. And that natural basis is that man

craves meaning in what he does and experiences. When man realizes that suffering is not useless, he can begin to find joy in it.

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived a World War II concentration camp, writes of one such example in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*:

Once, an elderly general practitioner consulted me because of his severe depression. He could not overcome the loss of his wife who had died two years before and whom he had loved above all else. Now, how can I help him? What should I tell him? Well, I refrained from telling him anything but instead confronted him with the question, "What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?" "Oh," he said, "for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Whereupon I replied, "You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering - to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her." He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left my office. In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice. (Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p.113)

This widower had discovered meaning in his suffering, and its blow was lessened. Although he didn't leave Dr. Frankl's office rejoicing, he did leave it comforted. How much more are the depressing feelings of our suffering reduced when we discover their salvific meaning when we suffer them in union with Christ. With Christ, feelings of depression can be transformed into joy. The Christian can know that in suffering with Christ "he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters . . . He is carrying out an irreplaceable service" (SD27). Suffering clears a space in human souls for grace to operate, transform, and redeem.

The Church has always seen a powerhouse of Spiritual energy in her suffering brothers and sisters and appeals to them for their help and support, for "the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness" (SD27). When we share in Christ's sufferings, we really can share a portion of the Redemption with others. We can be agents of salvation for others. What a phenomenal responsibility and privilege.

We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God Himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others. - Elisabeth Elliot (www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6264.Elisabeth_Elliott)

Q7. How have you been touched by the spiritual greatness and interior maturity of someone who found it a privilege to suffer with Christ?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Nine: Beg Mary to Teach you how to Suffer *with* Christ

What did you learn from Mary about suffering with Christ?

Commitment for Lesson Ten: Ask Jesus “Why?”, but Do it before a Crucifix

We each experience frustrations, difficulties, inconveniences. We also occasionally find ourselves in the midst of tragedies. Don't be afraid to ask God the “tough questions” - but do it while gazing at a Crucifix.

This week, write down your “tough questions” for God. Ask him these questions, but do it in front of a Crucifix. After asking, sit in silence, gaze on the Crucifix, and wait for his response.

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON ELEVEN

THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Part 1 of 2)

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. See your work in medicine as more than a profession, as a vocation
2. Learn from your fellow health care professionals effective ways of demonstrating compassion
3. Learn that one purpose of suffering is to unleash love on behalf of the suffering person

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Luke 10:25-37) [Stand] [Read aloud]

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" **27** And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." **29** But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man was going

down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, **34** and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37** He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: With which person in this parable do you most identify? Why?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 28-29a (This is the basis for this lesson's discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

28. To the Gospel of suffering there also belongs—and in an organic way—the parable of the Good Samaritan. Through this parable Christ wished to give an answer to the question: "Who is my neighbor?" (90) For of the three travelers along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, on which there lay half-dead a man who had been stripped and beaten by robbers, it was precisely the Samaritan who showed himself to be *the* of the victim: "neighbor" means also the person who carried out the commandment of love of neighbor. Two other men were passing along the same road; one was a priest and the other a Levite, but each of them "saw him and passed by on the other side". The Samaritan, on the other hand, "saw him and had compassion on him. He went to him, ... and bound up his wounds", then "brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (91). And when he left, he solicitously entrusted the suffering man to the care of the innkeeper, promising to meet any expenses.

The parable of the Good Samaritan belongs to the Gospel of suffering. For it indicates what the relationship of each of us must be toward our suffering neighbor. We are not allowed to "pass by on the other side" indifferently; we must "stop" beside him. *Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person*, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan. This stopping does not mean curiosity but availability. It is like the opening of a certain interior disposition of the heart, which also has an emotional expression of its own. The name "Good Samaritan" fits *every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others*, who "is moved" by the misfortune of another. If Christ, who knows the interior of man, emphasizes this compassion, this means that it is important for our whole attitude to others' suffering. Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to *compassion* toward a suffering person. Some times this

compassion remains the only or principal expression of our love for and solidarity with the sufferer.

Nevertheless, the Good Samaritan of Christ's parable does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone. They become for him an incentive to actions aimed at bringing help to the injured man. In a word, then, a Good Samaritan is *one who brings help in suffering*, whatever its nature may be. Help which is, as far as possible, effective. He puts his whole heart into it, nor does he spare material means. We can say that he gives himself, his very "I", opening this "I" to the other person. Here we touch upon one of the key-points of all Christian anthropology. Man cannot "fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (92). A Good Samaritan *is the person capable of exactly such a gift of self*.

29. Following the parable of the Gospel, we could say that suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order *to unleash love in the human person*, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions. The person who is a "neighbor" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another: this in the name of fundamental human solidarity, still more in the name of love of neighbor. He must "stop", "sympathize", just like the Samaritan of the Gospel parable. The parable in itself expresses *a deeply Christian truth*, but one that at the same time is very universally human. It is not without reason that, also in ordinary speech, any activity on behalf of the suffering and needy is called "Good Samaritan" work.

In the course of the centuries, this *activity* assumes organized *institutional forms* and constitutes a field of work in the respective *professions*. How much there is of "the Good Samaritan" in the profession of the doctor, or the nurse, or others similar! Considering its "evangelical" content, we are inclined to think here of a vocation rather than simply a profession. And the institutions which from generation to generation have performed "Good Samaritan" service have developed and specialized even further in our times. This undoubtedly proves that people today pay ever greater and closer attention to the sufferings of their neighbor, seek to understand those sufferings and deal with them with ever greater skill. They also have an ever greater capacity and specialization in this area. In view of all this, we can say that the parable of the Samaritan of the Gospel has become *one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization*. And thinking of all those who by their knowledge and ability provide many kinds of service to their suffering neighbor, we cannot but offer them words of thanks and gratitude.

REFERENCES

90) Lk. 10:29.

91) Lk. 10:33-34.

92) *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 28-31

Who is my Neighbor?

In addition to the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, the parables of Jesus are his best known teachings. Parables speak about universal human truths using everyday images. The parable of the Good Samaritan is among the most famous of Jesus' parables, as the term *Good Samaritan* has made it into everyday language to refer to "any activity on behalf of the suffering and needy" (SD29). The Pope goes as far as to say that this parable "has become one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization" (SD29).

Jesus told this parable to answer a lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" While Jews agreed on the answer to the lawyer's first question about what must be done to inherit eternal life, various factions disagreed on the definition of the "neighbor" they were called to "love as themselves" (Leviticus 19:18). The lawyer suspected that Jesus was an unschooled country bumpkin, and he tried to trap him between Jewish factions who held competing visions of how far the command of love extended among others. Is a neighbor only a fellow member of my own people living in a community of solidarity? Does *neighbor* include foreigners who live or walk among my people? Or is there (gasp!) an even broader range of people that I must love as a neighbor?

Jesus' answer startled the Jewish lawyer who asked him, because Jesus did not define neighbor based on shared relationship, geography, or beliefs. He defined a neighbor as one who loves and shows compassion. Instead of showing who Jews should consider as neighbors, Jesus showed a hated Samaritan considering the half-dead man as *his* neighbor, a man neglected by two experts in and servants of the Jewish law. This takes on deeper meaning, because in the previous chapter of Luke, Jesus himself was rejected by a Samaritan village.

Pope John Paul explains that "everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan" (SD28). When we stop beside a suffering person, we are to demonstrate our sensitivity to their suffering by making ourselves available to them; we are not to gawk out of curiosity. As Christians, we must cultivate this sensitivity of heart to show compassion to those who suffer.

Q1. What types of patients do you have the most difficulty treating with compassion? Why?

Q2. How can we "cultivate . . . sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to compassion towards a suffering person", especially in those we have most difficulty treating with compassion?

How do we give Ourselves to the Suffering?

Sometimes we will be able to do no more than suffer with another and do nothing to alleviate his pain. But other times, like the Good Samaritan, we will be able to go beyond sympathy and compassion to act in a way that brings help amidst suffering. A Good Samaritan puts his whole heart into alleviating suffering by opening himself to another person in need.

Christ taught that “whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Luke 17:33), and so his Church teaches the modern age that “Man . . . cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 24.3). A Good Samaritan is one capable of such a gift.

Saint James speaks of those who offer a false compassion:

If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled, “without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? (James 2:15-16)

This is similar to many non-religious people today who nevertheless realize that a compassionate response is socially correct when someone reveals their suffering, and yet the best they can muster is a smile and say “I’ll be thinking about you.” What good is that?! Perhaps such a response is because people do not know how to deal with their own suffering and therefore do not know how to respond to the suffering of others.

Q3. Describe effective ways in which you have seen others show compassion to those who suffer.

Q4. What are the most effective ways that you have found to demonstrate compassion to those who suffer?

And Still Another Purpose of Suffering

So far in this course, we have learned that suffering has various purposes: punishment for sin, a test of one’s character, and a source of redemption in salvific suffering. The Pope now points out yet another purpose. Suffering

is also present in order to *unleash love* in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love (SD29, emphasis added).

Again we see the intimate relationship between love and suffering. Not only is suffering the price of love, suffering also calls for, even yearns for love.

Q5. Describe an episode you witnessed or participated in where suffering "unleashed love".

Q6. How effective is a doctor, nurse, or other health care professional who has not suffered?

And Now a Word for Doctors, Nurses, and Other Health Care Professionals

The Pope then addresses us: "the doctor, or the nurse, or others similar" (SD29) because our professions provide an organized expression of the Good Samaritan. While the concept of vocation primarily applies to our fundamental state in life as priest, religious, married, or consecrated single, the Pope also says that we can think of our professions as *vocations*: "Considering [the health care profession's] "evangelical" content, we are inclined to think here of a vocation rather than simply a profession" (SD 29).

Vocation is derived from the Latin word *vocare* meaning 'to call'. With a vocation, it is God who does the calling – and we who do the listening and responding. However, a vocation is not *chosen* as much as it is *discovered*. There is a unique way that God wants us to share in the Church's mission within our particular vocations as priests, religious, married, or single people. You have a unique and specific task in life, *a task that no one can do but you*.

Therefore, John Paul II explained, the vocation God calls one to can be discerned precisely in the facts of one's life and situation. "What is my vocation?" means

in what direction should my personality develop, considering what I have in me, what I have to offer, and what others--other people and God--expect of me? (*Love and Responsibility*, p. 257)

God calls us in our particular circumstances considering our own specific gifts and opportunities. Our call will resonate deeply within us and lead to the deepest possible fulfillment. God will never ask us to sacrifice true self-fulfillment. God made us each for a specific reason, and in fulfilling that work, we fulfill our reason for being.

There are more hospitals and medical institutions in the world now than at any point in history demonstrating that “people today pay ever greater and closer attention to the sufferings of their neighbor, seek to understand those sufferings and deal with them with ever greater skill” (SD29).

Q7. How do you think doctors and nurses act differently if they consider their work a profession instead of a vocation, a job instead of a calling?

Q8. Have you experienced your path into medicine as a vocation or a profession? Please explain.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Ten: Ask Jesus “Why?”, but Do it before a Crucifix

What did you learn from asking Christ your “tough questions” while gazing at a Crucifix?

Commitment for Lesson Eleven: Unleash Love for someone who suffers

Before your next meeting, actively respond to someone who is suffering, especially if you are tempted to “conserve your emotional energy” or “not get involved”. Let that suffering, unleash the potential for love that you possess. Demonstrate that love in what you consider the most appropriate way for the one who is suffering.

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the

Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

LESSON TWELVE

THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Part 2 of 2) and CONCLUSION

OPENING PRAYER [Stand]

God, who created man in Your image and intended him to share Your Glory, we thank You for having granted to Your Church the gift of Professor Jérôme Lejeune, a distinguished Servant of Life.

He knew how to place his immense intelligence and deep faith at the service of the defense of human life, especially unborn life, always seeking to treat and to cure. A passionate witness to truth and charity, he knew how to reconcile faith and reason in the sight of today's world.

By his intercession, and according to Your will, we ask You to grant us the success of our Catholic Medical Guild to serve and expand the culture of life in Northeast Indiana, hoping that he will soon become one of Your saints. Amen.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, Pray for us.

SESSION GOALS [Stand] [Read aloud]

1. Learn what apostolate means
2. Decide to let God comfort you when you are suffering
3. Evaluate how this course has changed your understanding of suffering and your approach to those who suffer

GOSPEL REFLECTION (Matthew 25:31-46) [Stand] [Read aloud]

31 “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.**32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, **33** and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. **34** Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35** for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was

sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? **38** And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? **39** And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ **41** Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; **42** for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ **44** Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ **45** Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ **46** And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

[Reflect in silence for 5 minutes] [Sit down]

GOSPEL REFLECTION QUESTION: To what “sins of omission” are you most prone?

SALVIFICI DOLORIS 29b-31 (This is the basis for this lesson’s discussion. While participants will benefit more if they read this before meeting, it is not essential to benefit from the discussion. Only the section in normal-sized font should be read aloud following discussion of the Gospel Reflection Question.)

These words are directed to all those who exercise their own service to their suffering neighbor in an unselfish way, *freely undertaking to provide "Good Samaritan" help*, and devoting to this cause all the time and energy at their disposal outside their professional work. This kind of voluntary "Good Samaritan" or charitable activity can be called social work; it can also be called an *apostolate*, when it is undertaken for clearly evangelical motives, especially if this is in connection with the Church or another Christian Communion. Voluntary "Good Samaritan" work is carried out in appropriate *milieux* or through *organizations* created for this purpose. Working in this way has a great importance, especially if it involves undertaking larger tasks which require cooperation and the use of technical means. No less valuable is individual activity, especially by people who are better prepared for it in regard to the various kinds of human suffering which can only be alleviated in an individual or personal way. Finally, *family* help means both acts of love of neighbor done to members of the same family, and mutual help between families.

It is difficult to list here all the types and different circumstances of "Good Samaritan" work which exist in the Church and society. It must be recognized that they are very numerous, and one must express satisfaction at the fact that, thanks to them, the *fundamental moral values*, such as the value of human solidarity, the value of Christian love of neighbor, form the framework of social life and inter-human relationships and combat on this front the various forms of hatred, violence,

cruelty, contempt for others, or simple "insensitivity", in other words, indifference toward one's neighbor and his sufferings.

Here we come to the enormous *importance of having the right attitudes in education*. The family, the school and other education institutions must, if only for humanitarian reasons, work perseveringly for the reawakening and refining of that sensitivity toward one's neighbor and his suffering of which the figure of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel has become a symbol. Obviously the Church must do the same. She must even more profoundly make her own—as far as possible—the motivations which Christ placed in his parable and in the whole Gospel. The eloquence of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and of the whole Gospel, is especially this: every individual must feel as if *called personally* to bear witness to love in suffering. The institutions are very important and indispensable; nevertheless, no institution can by itself replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative, when it is a question of dealing with the sufferings of another. This refers to physical sufferings, but it is even more true when it is a question of the many kinds of moral suffering, and when it is primarily the soul that is suffering.

30. The parable of the Good Samaritan, which—as we have said—belongs to the Gospel of suffering, goes hand in hand with this Gospel through the history of the Church and Christianity, through the history of man and humanity. This parable witnesses to the fact that Christ's revelation of the salvific meaning of suffering *is in no way identified with an attitude of passivity*. Completely the reverse is true. The Gospel is the negation of passivity in the face of suffering. Christ himself is especially active in this field. In this way he accomplishes the messianic program of his mission, according to the words of the prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (93). In a superabundant way Christ carries out this *messianic program* of his mission: he goes about "doing good" (94). and the good of his works became especially evident in the face of human suffering. The parable of the Good Samaritan is in profound harmony with the conduct of Christ himself.

Finally, this parable, through its essential content, will enter into those disturbing words of the Final Judgment, noted by Matthew in his Gospel: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me" (95). To the just, who ask when they did all this to him, the Son of Man will respond: "Truly, I say to you, *as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren*, you did it to me" (96). The opposite sentence will be imposed on those who have behaved differently: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (97).

One could certainly extend the list of the forms of suffering that have encountered human sensitivity, compassion and help, or that have failed to do so. The first and second parts of Christ's words about the Final Judgment unambiguously show how essential it is, for the eternal life of every individual, to "stop", as the Good Samaritan did, at the suffering of one's neighbor, to have "compassion" for that suffering, and to give some help. In the messianic program of Christ, 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". In this love the salvific meaning of suffering is completely accomplished and reaches its definitive dimension. Christ's words about the Final Judgment enable us to understand this in all the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel.

These words about love, about actions of love, acts linked with human suffering, enable us once more to discover, at the basis of all *human sufferings, the same redemptive suffering of Christ*. Christ said: "You did it to me". He himself is the one who in each individual experiences love; he himself is the one who receives help, when this is given to every suffering person without exception. He himself is present in this suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened

once and for all to every human suffering. And all those who suffer have been called once and for all to become sharers "in Christ's sufferings" (98), just as all have been called to "complete" with their own suffering "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (99). At one and the same time Christ has taught man *to do good by his suffering* and *to do good to those who suffer*. In this double aspect he has completely revealed the meaning of suffering.

VIII. CONCLUSION

31. This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is *supernatural* because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply *human*, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission.

Suffering is certainly part of the mystery of man. Perhaps suffering is not wrapped up as much as man is by this mystery, which is an especially impenetrable one. The Second Vatican Council expressed this truth that "...only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. In fact..., Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and makes his supreme calling clear" (100). If these words refer to everything that concerns the mystery of man, then they certainly refer in a very special way *to human suffering*. Precisely at this point the "revealing of man to himself and making his supreme vocation clear" is particularly *indispensable*. It also happens as experience proves—that this can be particularly *dramatic*. But when it is completely accomplished and becomes the light of human life, it is particularly *blessed*. "Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful" (101).

I now end the present considerations on suffering in the year in which the Church is living the extraordinary Jubilee linked to the anniversary of the Redemption.

The mystery of the Redemption of the world is in an amazing way *rooted in suffering*, and this suffering in turn finds in the mystery of the Redemption its supreme and surest point of reference.

We wish to live this Year of the Redemption in special union with all those who suffer. And so there should come together in spirit beneath the Cross on Calvary all suffering people who believe in Christ, and particularly those who suffer because of their faith in him who is the Crucified and Risen One, so that the offering of their sufferings may hasten the fulfillment of the prayer of the Savior himself that all may be one (102). Let there also gather beneath the Cross all people of good will, for on this Cross is the "Redeemer of man", the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that *in love* they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions.

Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood *beneath the Cross* (103), we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man.

We invoke all *the Saints*, who down the centuries in a special way shared in the suffering of Christ. We ask them to support us.

And we ask all you *who suffer* to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak *to become a source of strength* for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!

To all of you, dearest brothers and sisters, I send my Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the liturgical Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February 1984, in the sixth year of my Pontificate.

REFERENCES

93) Lk. 4:18-19; cf. Is. 61:1-2.

94) Acts 10:38.

95) Mt. 25:34-36.

96) Mt. 25:40.

97) Mt. 25:45.

98) 1 Pt. 4:13.

99) Col. 1:24.

100) *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

101) *Ibid.*

102) Cf. Jn. 17:11, 21-22.

103) Cf. Jn. 19:25.

SUMMARY AND EXPLICATION OF *SALVIFICI DOLORIS* 29b-31

The Call to Apostolate

When lay people freely give themselves in Good Samaritan work outside of paid, professional work, such charitable activity is called *apostolate* when undertaken for evangelical motives, that is, to spread the Gospel through word and action. Most Catholics are unfamiliar with the term *apostolate* and tend to think of such evangelical work as *ministry*. However, *ministry* primarily and properly refers to evangelical work, particularly administration of the sacraments, performed by those in Holy Orders (Bishops, Priests, Deacons).

Ministry has historically, and in the Vatican II documents, been restricted to only those activities that flow from Holy Orders. The Vatican II document on the Apostolate of the Laity never uses the term *minister* or *ministry* to refer to lay people - these terms only refer to those admitted to Holy Orders and the actions that flow from them. Of course, lay people can be *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*, but that demonstrates the point that they are not normally, or ordinarily, ministers. (One exception, a lay man and lay women *are* the ordinary ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony. One in Holy Orders cannot be a Minister of the Sacrament of Matrimony. But even this exception points out that the proper roles of Catholics flow from the Sacraments they have received - Baptism and Confirmation for the Laity; Holy Orders for Ordained Ministers.)

John Paul II clarified this differentiation in *Christifideles Laici* where he wrote

. . . The exercise of such tasks [of ministry] does not make the lay faithful pastors: in fact a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ . . . (CL 23)

While lay people are not ordained ministers, they can participate in the mission of the Church in various apostolates as lay ecclesial ministers. Some ministries can be delegated to lay people - lecturing, serving as acolyte, and distributing Holy Communion. When the laity participate in ministries, it is only by the delegation of a bishop or priest, the minister (CL 23). By virtue of the sacramental life, all the baptized – ordained, lay, or vowed – participate in the mission of the Church in different ways.

Evangelical work initiated and performed by the laity is properly called *apostolate*; the Vatican II document on the laity is even called *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. Apostolate includes “every activity of the Mystical Body that aims to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth” (CCC 864).

“For the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate. Indeed, the organic union in this body and the structure of the members are so compact that the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself. Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.” (Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity 2)

Q1. In what apostolic works have you participated or do you currently participate? Which have you found most rewarding? Why?

Each Christian is called to extend Christ’s Kingdom in the world. Because lay people have access to the midst of the world and its concerns, they are in the best position to spread Christ’s Kingdom more widely than a priest who does not have ready access to family, work, and social environments.

Because of the numerous institutions and individuals that provide Good Samaritan work, fundamental moral values now form the framework of social life and human relationships. Such moral values include Christian love for one’s neighbor and solidarity with the suffering and needy.

Need for Formation in Compassion

The Pope emphasizes that our educational institutions, including those programs that train doctors, nurses, and others, must persevere in awakening and refining in students a sensitivity toward one's neighbor and his suffering. The Church must go even further to make her own, the same motivation that "Christ placed in this parable and in the whole Gospel" (SD29). Each individual, especially doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals, must believe that they are personally called to "bear witness to love in suffering" (SD29). Our institutions do not, without properly motivated individuals, "replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative" required in dealing with those who suffer (SD29). Our institutions can only accomplish this through individuals who "bear witness to love in suffering".

Q2. What Good Samaritan organizations do you know that are particularly effective at alleviating human suffering? Why are they effective?

Q3. Is Good Samaritan work different when provided by a Church organization vs. a governmental institutions? If so, how and why?

We Must be Active in the Face of Suffering

The salvific nature of suffering spurns passivity. Christ was activity itself in the face of suffering. He was not like the one described by Saint James:

If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? (James 2:15-16)

We must be like Christ and go about doing good in the face of human suffering. If we do, we will hear those glorious words addressed to us:

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me . . . As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Matthew 25:34-36, 40).

However, if we persist in passivity in the face of human suffering, we risk hearing Our Lord tell us, “Depart from me, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me” (Matthew 25:41, 45).

Q4. Have you ever been passive in the face of suffering? If so, why?

Q5. How do we imbibe “the motivations which Christ placed in his parable and in the whole Gospel”? In other words, how do we develop the sense that we are each personally called to bear witness to love in suffering?

We Can Only Give Compassion if we have Received Compassion

These words from the Final Judgment unambiguously show us that when confronted with human suffering, it is mandatory for the Christian to *stop, have compassion, and act* to give some help. Suffering that we encounter is meant to release love *from us*. Enough raw material of suffering is present throughout the world to unleash an ocean of God’s love; but that love is meant to come through us. And where do we get this love to share? Saint Paul tells us

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 afflictions, 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. (II Corinthians 1:3-4)

Only if we are comforted with the love of God in our own afflictions will we have loving comfort to give to others who need it. We can’t give what we don’t have. When we release love in the face of suffering, we contribute to transforming “the whole human civilization into a civilization of love” (SD30). In so doing, we advance the Culture of Life amidst a Culture of Death.

The Pope emphasizes two key points that “completely reveal the meaning of suffering” (SD30). First, man can do good with his own suffering, because with it, he can help save himself and others. We really can offer up our suffering to achieve good. Our suffering really is a force to transform the world for good. Second, we must do

good to those who suffer. We are only fulfilled in happiness when we respond to suffering with love.

The double meaning of suffering is this: suffering saves and suffering unleashes love.

Q6. How do you understand suffering differently now that you have participated in this course?

Q7. In what practical ways will you deal differently with suffering - both your own and that of others?

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

From Lesson Eleven: Unleash Love for someone who suffers

How were you able to unleash love for someone who was suffering? What was the result?

Commitment for Lesson Twelve: Evaluate the Impact of this Course in your Life

Complete the Personal Evaluation Form in the Workbook at the end of the Course

CLOSING PRAYERS [Stand]

Saint Gianna, heroically Christlike wife, mother and physician, I ask the help of your prayers, as I strive to follow your holy example in my physical and spiritual trials.

Help me, by your prayers, to recognize the suffering of the Cross as the way to pure and selfless love of God and my neighbor. May your practice of medicine with priestly care of both body and soul inspire physicians to see the Face of the suffering Christ in their patients.

May your loving acceptance of illness and death help patients to know and do God's will in all things, uniting their sufferings to the Passion and Death of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Saint Gianna, pray for us always that we may have a heart, meek and courageous, like the Heart of Jesus, in Whom we find our healing and strength. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Lady, Comfort of the Afflicted, Pray for Us.

Workbook

Commitment for Lesson One: Memorize Colossians 1:24 and reflect on it daily

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

Commitment for Lesson Two: Learn how to respond to a tough question about evil

Write out your answer to how you will answer the question:

If God created everything that exists, why did he create evil (or suffering)?

Have someone ask you this question and practice your answer aloud so that you are ready when someone asks you this. (This is *not* the same as the question, "Why does God allow suffering?" We will discuss that in later lessons.)

Commitment for Lesson Three: Learn how other people understand the meaning of suffering

Ask at least three people (relatives, friends, patients) the following question: What is the meaning of suffering. Write down their answers.

1.

2.

3.

Commitment for Lesson Four: Immerse yourself in someone else's suffering.

Choose a family members, friend, or patient and

- 1 - Pray daily for the relief of their suffering
- 2 - Offer one small sacrifice a day for the alleviation of their suffering
- 3 - Do something to show you that you care about them in their suffering (visit, talk, write, bring them a gift, etc.)

At the end of doing this for a month, what effect has this had on you? On the other person?

Commitment for Lesson Five: Develop your spiritual eyesight.

Pick a person you do not like and have difficulty loving. Exercise your spiritual eyesight by trying to see the types of suffering they undergo. Try to look at life from the perspective of that person. **Write down** the types of suffering you think that person undergoes.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Look at yourself from the perspective of that person. Write down what they see of you. **Pray for that person.**

Commitment for Lesson Six: Offer Up Sacrifices Throughout the Day for Others

Exercise your lay priesthood today. The next inconvenience or difficulty you encounter, accept it willingly and offer it to God for the person you know who needs God's help the most. Write down at least one thing you offered up each day for the first week.

Day 1 -

Day 2 -

Day 3 -

Day 4 -

Day 5 -

Day 6 -

Day 7 -

Commitment for Lesson Seven: Respond Immediately to Suffering

When something inconvenient, painful, or unexpectedly bad happens to you, how do you usually respond? If you would like to respond more like Christ, decide on something that you will do *immediately* (or as soon as you realize you are not responding in a Christian manner). Choose something that has meaning for you. Once you have chosen this, practice it regularly and write down the first five times you have occasion to use it.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Commitment for Lesson Eight: Determine Your Ultimate Bucket List

There is great cultural discussion about “bucket lists”; what we want to do before we “kick the bucket”. Re-read the excerpt from *Spe Salvi* before question 3. Note Pope Benedict’s question, “So what do we really want?” What *do you* really want in life?

When you are on your death-bed or when you are in front of Christ at your own personal judgment, what will you wish had been on your bucket list? What will you wish you had accomplished during your life?

Write out your bucket list. Include those things that will matter when you are on your death-bed or before Christ at your final judgment.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Commitment for Lesson Nine: Beg Mary to Teach you to Suffer with Christ

Each morning and evening, pray the *Memorare* and ask Our Lady to teach you how to suffer with Christ so that no suffering is wasted and so that your soul is renewed, strengthened, and matured

**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 with this confidence,
I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of Virgins my Mother;
To thee 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.**

Commitment for Lesson Ten: Ask Jesus “Why?”, but Do it before a Crucifix

We each experience frustrations, difficulties, inconveniences. We also occasionally find ourselves in the midst of tragedies. Don't be afraid to ask God the “tough questions” - but do it while gazing at a Crucifix.

This week, write down your “tough questions” for God. Ask him these questions, but do it in front of a Crucifix. After asking, sit in silence, gaze on the Crucifix, and wait for his response.

Your “Tough Questions”:

Commitment for Lesson Eleven: Unleash Love for someone who suffers

Before your next meeting, actively respond to someone who is suffering, especially if you are tempted to “conserve your emotional energy” or “not get involved”. Let that suffering, unleash the potential for love that you possess. Demonstrate that love in what you consider the most appropriate way for the one who is suffering.

Commitment for Lesson Twelve: Evaluate the Impact of this Course in your Life

After answering these questions, set up a time to discuss your answers with somebody else who took this course.

1. What was the most surprising thing you learned about suffering?

2. What are some of the purposes of suffering?

3. What are the meanings of suffering?

4. What was the most helpful thing you learned to help you with your own suffering?

5. What was the most helpful thing you learned to help you show compassion for others who suffer?

6. What will you do now that this course is complete to continue integrating your faith with your vocation in medicine?

Practical Points for Patients

8 - Suffering leads to solidarity with others who suffer

9 - Finding answers to the “why” of suffering including its cause, reason, purpose, and meaning helps to alleviate the suffering of others.

12 - Suffering creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers.

15 - Suffering has meaning because it saves and redeems from sin, evil, and death

25 - Turn to Mary. She understands suffering better than any other person than Christ.

26 - Gaze at the Crucifix when you want to know the meaning of suffering

29 - Purposes for suffering

Punishment

Leading to solidarity with others who suffer

Creates possibility of rebuilding good ness in one who suffers

Test of Character

Redemption from sin, evil, death

Unleash Love

30 - Meanings of Suffering

Redemption

Unleashing Love

1 1254

2 1585

3 1389

4 1291

5 1283

6 1229

7 1368

8 1309

9 1277

10 1199

11 1245

12 1449