



Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 13, 2015 B

- ◆ Dealing with the crosses of life
- ◆ “The Saints’ Guide to Happiness”
- ◆ Recent announcements by Pope Francis on abortion and annulment

In today’s Gospel, Mark 8:31 reads:

“Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer much, be rejected...be put to death, and rise three days later.”

The late Fr. Henri Nouwen once said: *“Finding new life through suffering and death—that is the core of the good news.”* If our Lord and Savior suffered, so must we his disciples. If Jesus’ suffering led him to new life, so can our suffering lead us to a new and transformed life.

Types of suffering

The daily news gives us examples of many types of suffering:

- Soldiers and innocent civilians killed or injured in roadside bombs or terrorists attacks
- Homes and property destroyed by fires, tornados and hurricanes
- Individuals killed or injured by a gunman
- Children kidnapped, molested and abused in their own homes
- Thousands of people dying of starvation and lack of clean water
- Refugees desperate to find a home

Closer to home, we experience or hear about other forms of suffering such as:

- Cancer or some other serious disease. In such situations, the sick as well as their families and caregivers all suffer.
- Painful relationships
- Challenges facing the “sandwich generation”—parents dealing with adult children who have lots of problems while also caring for aging parents who need much attention
- Anguish in the death of a loved one
- Distress at work due to difficult co-workers, bad working environment, etc.
- Addiction

- Spiritual crisis: we feel God is distant or has abandoned us; we experience rejection/harassment by our own family and friends when we try to live a good spiritual life.

What other types of sufferings did I miss?

Coping

When it comes to dealing with personal suffering and the suffering of loved ones, I believe some of the best wisdom can be found in the short version of the Serenity Prayer.

Lord, grant me the grace to change what can be changed, to accept what cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

“To change what can be changed”

In the case of illness, this means seeking out the best medical help available to us.

In the case of the loss of a loved one, it means being open to joining a grief support group and becoming aware of the dynamics of the grieving process.

In the case of poor relationships, it may entail changing our attitude towards the person we have a difficult time with. While we cannot change another person, we can always change ourselves. This may mean doing the difficult work of forgiveness. Or it may mean realizing that we may never have a good relationship with certain people and learning to live with that.

In the case of loss of work, it obviously calls us to seek work. It may also mean being open to using our time of unemployment to pray more and do volunteer work.

In the case of huge losses in the stock market, it is a big opportunity to reassess the role of money and material things in our lives. One woman told me that her big losses were helping her to become more detached from preoccupation with material things.

For couples experiencing difficulty in marriage, changing what can be changed is always a call to transform themselves rather than focusing on what is wrong with the other. Perhaps it is a time to “lower *one’s* expectations and raise *one’s* performance.” It is a time

to die to self. It is also an opportunity to look into attending Marriage Encounter or a Retrouvaille weekend (the latter is for couples whose marriage is in serious trouble).

For people suffering from an addiction of some kind, changing what can be changed may mean being willing to join an AA group and to daily get down on our knees to pray for God's grace to say 'no' to our addiction for today. It is a time to believe more than ever that "while I can't, God can."

In general, changing what can be changed may mean:

- Reaching out for help. It is amazing how many people are too private or too proud or stubborn to reach out for help. When we are like that, we tie God's hands. Reaching out demands *humility*, the foundation virtue of the spiritual life. It also demands a willingness to be *vulnerable*. Vulnerability and humility are wonderful virtues to develop.
- Changing what can be changed will often mean letting go of old ways of thinking that do not serve us well, e.g., "I can deal with my problem on my own."

Recognizing that when it comes to suffering and bad things, God *always* wants to use them to bring about good in our lives; the devil wants to use them to destroy us and to make us bitter. God wants to use the bad to draw us closer to him; the devil wants to use them to distance us from God and the Church.

"To accept what cannot be changed now or never"

Some things can never be changed, e.g., a loved one who died will never return. Lots of other things *may* never be changed, e.g., a spouse with a particular negative attitude, a particular illness. In such situations, we are called to accept what cannot be changed or is not changing *now*. Sometimes we must work at *acceptance* even as we struggle to change what is not changing *now*. For example, one may be presently suffering from a particular illness. It may be cured in the future and we need to do all we can to facilitate that. But in the meantime, this illness is part of our reality and we must learn to live with it and even see if somehow we can grow through this situation. Needless to say, that can be a huge challenge in some situations. Most likely, people with a combative personality will have a more difficult challenge with acceptance than people with more of a tendency to resign themselves to what is. In all these situations, our spiritual resources, our psychological make-up and the presence of family and friends will determine to a huge degree how we respond to pain and suffering.

"The wisdom to know the difference"

How long does one keep fighting for a marriage? Many would say: "Until death do us part." But what if it is abusive and destructive to the lives of the spouses and kids? Or how long does one keep fighting to survive cancer?

When Ted Kennedy was diagnosed with brain cancer, he did everything possible to find a cure. Through treatments, his life was extended. But at some point, he and his wife decided that he was not going to win this battle and came to accept that he had only a few more months or weeks to live. We need God's wisdom to know when to keep fighting, to change what can be changed and to accept what cannot be changed.

Dealing with God

Some of us may never feel angry with God about the bad stuff in our lives. We just accept that sometimes bad things happen. We believe that God isn't punishing us and that somehow we have to weather the storm through the help of prayer and friends. Others may experience a lot of anger toward God for the crappy situation in which they find themselves. They may fight it out with God like the psalmists did, or they may withdraw and quit praying. If we are the fighting, confrontational type, we will most likely fight it out with God. If our general tendency in tense relational situations is to withdraw and become silent, we may also withdraw from God and quit praying and/or going to church. Consciously or unconsciously, we may, give God the silent treatment. Obviously, the more desirable option is to stay relating to God even if we are mad with him. It shows that we care enough about the relationship to fight for it.

The interesting thing in all this is that God, whom we may see as the source of our problem, is also the one whom we most need to help us through our problem—just like being mad with our doctor who holds the key to our physical well-being. There is no easy way to handle all this emotional turmoil. Some people do it more effectively than others, usually because of their willingness to confront the issues and deal with them. Once again, many people, including myself, find it very helpful when we can talk through our thoughts and feelings with others who are willing to listen and offer us feedback if we ask for it. Sometimes all we need is a compassionate ear to vent into. If I can be such a person for you, do not hesitate to call me or someone on our pastoral team.

We should often pray for people who are going through hard times, that their tough experiences will not lead them to become bitter with life. I'll close this piece with a prayer called *The Weaver*.

**My life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow,
and I in foolish pride
forget He sees the upper
and I, the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
and the shuttles cease to fly
shall God unroll the canvas
and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
in the Weaver's skillful hand
as the threads of gold and silver
in the pattern He has planned.**

Author unknown

The Saints' Guide to Happiness— a book you will enjoy and benefit from

Recently, I started to reread a book I had read some years ago (I reread very few books). I am *very much* enjoying my reread of *The Saints' Guide to Happiness—Practical Lessons in the Life of the Spirit*.

In the introduction, the author, Robert Ellsberg, writes:

The lives of the saints, like our own, were often marked by suffering and hardship. If the saint's version of happiness meant being eaten by lions or wearing a hair shirt, it would likely attract few takers. But it is a mistake to identify saints with hardship and misery. In general they were renowned for their balance and good humor, their compassion and generosity, their spirit of peace and freedom in the face of obstacles and adversities, and their ability to find joy in all things. Such qualities made them, in many cases, the object not only of veneration but also of wonder and desire on the part of their contemporaries.

By the same token, it is a mistake to think of saints simply as figures from long ago. They are everywhere in our midst. Some of them are exceptional figures like Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Oscar Romero, or Mother Teresa. Others may be people we know or pass every day: people who remind us of God, people whose love, courage, and inner balance seem to set them

apart—not above ordinary humanity, but as a standard of what human beings ought to be. When we are with such people, we come away feeling gladder, more grateful to be alive, perhaps wishing that we knew the “secret” of their inner illumination.

Chapter titles. The following are the titles of the eight chapters.

1. **Learning to be alive**
2. **Learning to let go**
3. **Learning to work**
4. **Learning to sit still**
5. **Learning to love**
6. **Learning to suffer**
7. **Learning to die**
8. **Learning to see conclusion**

I especially recommend the book to those of you who come to the Adoration Chapel and make time to sit and reflect on a good spiritual read. The good news is that we will be selling this book next Sunday for \$5. If you usually come to the 11:30am or 5:30pm Mass when good books are sometimes all gone, you may want to come to the Parish Office to get your copy or else ask Teresa to save you one.

The Pope bypasses bishops who have kept the sin of abortion a reserved sin.

When it was announced two weeks ago that the Pope had granted priests during the Year of Mercy permission to forgive the sin of abortion, it made headlines with the news media.

I assume many other priests and laity were surprised and maybe confused by the announcement. After all, in a vast majority of dioceses throughout the world, the absolution for abortion is no longer reserved to the local bishop. But it seems some bishops still consider abortion a reserved sin. What Francis has done is bypass those bishops who have not given their priests permission to forgive abortion without first contacting him. On this issue, Francis says: *“One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life.... The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails.”*

He adds, however, that many women experience abortion *“as a moment of defeat,”* believing they have *“no other option.”*

Speaking of those women, Francis further writes: *“I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their*

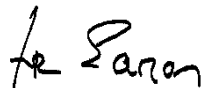
heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father.”

Praise God for Pope Francis!

Annulments

On the *Nightly News* this past week, it was announced that the annulment process was going to be streamlined so that it does not take so long. After a case is granted at our Marriage Tribunal in Orlando, it will not need to be sent to Miami for a second look, which would otherwise delay the process by about 3 months. Also, Pope Francis has asked that the *cost* of annulments be reduced or cut out altogether. A few months ago, Bishop Noonan acted on the Pope’s request and removed all costs connected with annulments.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.