

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

How can we make sense of suffering? Christians know the life of a disciple will not be easy. Christ did not mince words about this — telling his disciples they must take on life's sufferings as in the form of capital punishment that would later be used to take his life: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

How do Christians make sense of the crosses they bear? The question of why suffering exists finds its answer in Christ's transformation of suffering through love. Christ's cross makes sense of our own, hence the universal appeal of popular devotions like the Stations of the Cross.

The universal reality of suffering makes devotions inspiring meditation on the passion and death of Jesus particularly relevant in Christian life. Such prayer forms like the Stations of the Cross are popular in the season of Lent. They have become a primary opportunity for the faithful to learn the purpose of their crosses.

It makes sense, then, that those who have "put on Christ," becoming members of his body through baptism -- a bond renewed and strengthened in each reception of holy Communion -- should expect nothing less than a share in Christ's own passion and cross. In light of Christ's passion, it likewise makes sense to understand suffering's purpose as rooted in love. "If you really want to love Jesus," St. Gemma Galgani said, "first learn to suffer, because suffering teaches you to love."

Christ's own suffering and death has untold value and immense purpose — through which God bought us back from the slavery of sin and death. So, too, does ours, because, as St. John Paul II described it, "everyone, in their suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ" (*Salvifici Doloris*, No. 19). The Stations of the Cross make real every imaginable aspect of human suffering that was on full display at Christ's passion. And they teach us to see the fruit of suffering.

In meditating on Christ's passion and death, comes the realization that life's sufferings can be joined to Christ's -- by which one learns that love forms suffering's foundation. "The road is narrow," St. John of the Cross said. "He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his cane. In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things." The cane I use when I walk is my personal reminder of the Cross.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, weeks before he was elected pope following the death of Pope John Paul II, referenced this when he said that Jesus not only taught us how to pray the Stations of the Cross, but also their meaning. "The Way of the Cross is the path of losing ourselves," he said, "the path of true love." Suffering expresses love's total self-emptying required of the disciple. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:24).

There are two particular days in the calendar that make me smile when Good Friday falls on those days: April 1st and April 15th. When Good Friday falls on April 1st, we are reminded that Christ made a fool of sin and death and calls us to become "fools for Christ," as St. Paul says. When Good Friday falls on April 15th, Income Tax day, like today, you and I are reminded of the Supreme Price Jesus Christ paid for us, for our sins, for our sickness and death. Talk about getting back a great refund!

We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world. AMEN!