

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

Why did Jesus have to die such a violent death, with so much torture and suffering? What does the Church teach on this?

There are different ways to address this concern. From the perspective of our sins, Jesus died so horribly because that is what our redemption costs. We tend to underestimate just how awful our sins are and the kind of suffering they have set loose in the world. Jesus takes up and experiences the full load of human suffering we have inflicted on each other. He paints a picture of the disfiguring and painful effects of our disobedience. It begs a question from us: "Lord, are our sins really that bad?" "Yes, they really are" comes the answer.

From the perspective of love, we see the immense love of Jesus Christ for us that He undergoes such suffering to save us. This, too, begs another question: "Lord, is my soul worth this much?" "Yes, it is" comes the answer.

St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "Speaking generically, [Christ] did endure every human suffering. This admits of a threefold [application]. First of all, on the part of men: for He endured something from Gentiles and from Jews; from men and from women, as is clear from the women servants who accused Peter. He suffered from the rulers, from their servants and from the mob, according to Psalm 2:1-2: 'Why have the Gentiles raged, and the people devised vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together, against the Lord and against His Christ.' He suffered from friends and acquaintances, as is manifest from Judas betraying and Peter denying Him.

"Secondly, the same is evident on the part of the sufferings which you and I can endure. For Christ suffered from friends abandoning Him; in His reputation, from the blasphemies hurled at Him; in His honor and glory, from the mockeries and the insults heaped upon Him; in things, for He was stripped of His garments; in His soul, from sadness, weariness, and fear; in His body, from wounds and scourgings.

"Thirdly, it may be considered with regard to His bodily members. In His head He suffered from the crown of piercing thorns; in His hands and feet, from

the fastening of the nails; on His face from the punches and spitting; and from the lashes over His entire body. Jesus Christ suffered in all His bodily senses: in touch, by being scourged and nailed; in taste, by being given vinegar and gall to drink; in smell, by being crucified in a place reeking with the stench of corpses, ‘which is called Calvary’; in hearing, by being tormented with the cries of blasphemers and scorers; in sight, by beholding the tears of His Mother and of the disciple whom He loved.” (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 46.5)

And so, in these ways, Christ comprehensively experiences all the sorts of ways we suffer. Scripture says: “Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all” (Is 53:3-6). Finally, we must admit that some of the answer to the often mysterious providence of God who deemed that this sort of death was both necessary and efficacious for us.

You and I know that 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). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, weeks before he was elected pope following the death of Pope John Paul II, referenced this when he said, “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. Pope St. John Paul II wrote: “Out of love, Christ gave of Himself completely, even unto death — handing over his spirit out of obedience to the Father’s will (see Lk 23:46). May we do the same. We adore you O Christ and we bless you! Because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.” AMEN!