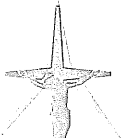


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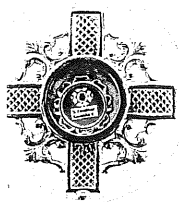
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REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

By Frank Fanella, Parishioner

An old friend of mine was recently diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of breast cancer. It may be that she will still enjoy many good years, but this year will bring chemotherapy, surgery, suffering, anxiety and pain. It will be a year of shadows.

My friend is a good Catholic and she will live this year in faith uniting her suffering to the suffering of our Lord. Redemptive Suffering is a profound mystery. We struggle to understand it.

Wrestling with this mystery, however, may strengthen us when our sorrows come. During Lent, our thoughts are quite naturally drawn to suffering. Lent begins in ashes and ends in crucifixion. During this season, we make a concerted effort to confront the weakness and vulnerability of our humanity and draw closer to God.

We see the suffering on the cross ever more prominently now. In our Lenten practices, we dare to enter that circle of suffering where John and Mary stood at the foot of the cross.

Prayerfully, let us enter that painful circle together. What do we see? We see jagged scars, pain, agony and a broken body. We see nails in hands and feet and blood pouring out. We see a cross. We see love.

What do we hear? We hear forgiveness. We hear muffled chaos around us. We hear a Son speaking to His mother. We hear words of paradise. We hear the final offering of spirit to God.

What do we feel? We feel sorrow and sadness and pain. We feel the sad and penetrating eyes of Jesus looking right at us. We feel hopeless and defeated. We feel crushed and forever lost.

What do we experience? We experience darkness and death. We experience a despair we didn't know existed. We witness a Body taken down and a mother's sorrow. We experience the end of times.

And if we were to turn around and look back from this circle of suffering, we would clearly see the sin, pride and exalted arrogance that led to all of this. We would recognize that all of the sins outside of the circle were directed at the Man on the cross. He suffered them all: assault, betrayal, false accusation, abandonment, threats, ridicule, scorn, humiliation, rejection, hate and now, murder. We would come to understand how all of these sins were still streaming towards that Man on the cross and holding Him there like lashes, more tightly than the nails.

And we, too, would remember that we were once outside of the circle.

In this moment, words wash over us, "Father, forgive them..." The great work of redemption spreads out from the circle now in all directions, like waves of love from the beating heart of divinity.

Suffering is the solemn, sacred heart of Lent. It is the highest spiritual and contemplative plateau we can reach in this season of penance. In the hands of our Lord, human suffering is united with divinity and transformed into resurrection and redemption.

We are asked to carry our cross. If we understand what He can do despite our sins, imagine what He can do with the daily sacrifices and sufferings we may offer Him. Accept them. Let them go and share them with the heart of Jesus.

IF ONLY I WERE GOD

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