

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Book of Prophet Hosea (*Hosea 2:16-17*)

Therefore, I will allure her now; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her. Then I will give her the vineyards she had, and the valley of Achor as a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as on the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. The Word of the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

Reflection – God speaks to us persuasively during our suffering

In Christ, suffering is redemptive. By His wounds we were healed (Isaiah 53:5). When Jesus came into our world and redeems it by His own Blood, pain and suffering, He gives new meaning to the mystery of human suffering. Through His own suffering, Jesus sanctifies all human suffering that are accepted and borne patiently and especially those that are voluntarily united and offered to Him out of love. Thus, suffering should never be wasted but offered to God as a priceless gift to help save souls in need of repentance. There are so many unrepentant souls and so much need for prayer and sacrifices on their behalf, that our Lord specially calls some souls that are close to Him to a deeper share of His sorrowful Passion. The saints, known and unknown led holy lives marked by prayer, sacrifice and suffering in union with that of Jesus, the Suffering Servant of God.

Suffering detaches us from unholy attachments and simplifies our lives. For many souls, unholy attachments stand in the way of growing in holiness. In the absence of the liberating grace that comes with suffering, a soul will find it difficult to break these bondages. Attachment may take many different forms: it may be an attachment to self, or another person or a created thing. Whatever form it takes, there are some common features: it weakens the soul from pursuing holiness, and creates opportunities for sin. Thus, suffering can be a great purification if it is accepted in good faith.

Suffering releases us from pursuing our busy agenda, gives us time and puts us into the presence of God. God is close to those who suffer. Which mother is not at the bedside of her feverish child? *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed (Psalm 34:19)*. The devil and his angels have to stay away. This is a time when the Lord can speak persuasively to the heart of the afflicted, and work less hampered on its sanctification. Sanctification occurs when a soul opens its eyes to see the truth regarding the state of one's heart, recognizes faults and weaknesses with honesty, and resolves with God's grace to overcome them. Thus, God will send trials and suffering in order to help us in our sanctification, to grow in faith and trust of God. All sufferings are sent for a good reason. It is never longer than is necessary. But it always serves the welfare of the soul especially its eternal salvation. Solid trust in God takes the fear out of any suffering the Lord may send.

Suffering opens our eyes and breaks down our unholy resistance to God. There are stubborn souls that reject God till the last chapter of their lives when they are visited by a great illness. With eyes opened to see the truth and in coming face to face with harsh reality, the soul's unholy resistance to the love and mercy of God breaks down, and through the grace of God, proceeds on to the next stage of life with true repentance of their sins and thus, attaining hope of a glorious, eternal life in Paradise that God has created for His children. Thus, with an open heart, suffering can be a great redeeming grace from God.

Removal of unholy attachments helps us respond to God's calling. St John the Baptist spent most of his time before his public ministry in the desert, preparing himself as the forerunner of Jesus Christ, paving the way ahead for the Lord. He endured untold suffering in the wilderness: putting up with the harshness of desert climate, eating locusts for food, wearing animal skins for clothes, sleeping on the ground, putting up with insects and other pests, etc. St John the Baptist emerged strong after his living in the desert. He was not overcome by his own popularity but said: "He must increase and I decrease." (cf. John 3:30). At the expense of his own life, St John the Baptist stood up to King Herod and told him that it was wrong of him to live with his brother's wife. St John the Baptist is a great saint in the eyes of God.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, thank You for all the suffering that You have sent or will send into my life. Human nature is afraid of suffering and will do anything to avoid it. Yet, You show us by Your sorrowful Passion how suffering accepted and offered to God can help save souls. In my love for You, I offer to You all my sufferings from my first day on earth to the last, and unite them to Your suffering on Calvary so that my suffering can become like Yours which is redemptive and infinite in value, in order to save lost souls. I beg Your mercy for the salvation of every soul that has fallen from grace. Fill all hearts with Your love so that souls can accept in good faith the suffering You sent. Please give the grace to all who are suffering to feel Your Presence and Your love so that their burden can be lightened and their love for You ignited. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus. www.twohearts.hk