

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING

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Foundress

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The Holy Father, John Paul II, has convoked the Jubilee of the Sick on the 11th of February, a day on which we commemorate and celebrate the apparition of Our Lady to Bernadette in Lourdes. I believe that this desire - to unite on this day all of the sick in Rome, Lourdes and throughout the world, and to pray that the abundant graces of this Jubilee would flow upon them and for them - was a particularly eloquent gesture. It has been his desire to entrust all those who suffer in some way to the protection of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The Holy Father has desired to emphasize the fundamental importance of suffering and the person who suffers. He wanted to tell the whole world that suffering has a positive significance, and even more, becomes a wellspring of life for all of humanity when it is lived with Christ.

Inviting us to understand the redemptive value of suffering that is central to our faith, the Holy Father tells us that all those who are sick can offer their suffering to Christ in order to find its meaning; in this way, their sufferings can be united to the sufferings of the Redeemer, who transforms them into rivers of overall health, sometimes even physical.

During the celebration of the Holy Mass in St. Peter's along with thousands of sick, the Holy Father proclaimed words that were full of love and of great challenge for all of us: "My dear brothers and sisters that suffer, we are greatly indebted to you. The Church is indebted to you. The Holy Father too. Pray for us!" (Homily, February 11, 2000)

The Holy Father wanted to emphasize a message that was very close to his heart which he has spoken on many occasions to all of humanity throughout his pontificate: the sufferings of those who are sick, together with their prayers, are a powerful force of grace and salvation for the Universal Church.

In all of his apostolic trips, the Holy Father visits and has an encounter with those who are sick and suffering. In the Czech Republic in 1997, he gave a vision of suffering that is worthwhile for us to mediate on: "Each one of you make up a hidden force that contributes in great measure to the life of the Church; with your sufferings you participate in the redemption of the world. You are also placed by God as a column in the temple of the Church so as to be a firm support. The Church, my dear sick brothers and sisters, thanks you for your patience, your Christian resignation, and even more, for the generous and sacrificial manner in which you bear, sometimes even heroically, the Cross that Jesus has placed upon your shoulders. You are close to His Heart. You give a courageous testimony in this world often poor in values, which often confuses love with pleasure and which considers pain as something without meaning." (Address, April 26, 1997, no. 3)

Do the sick understand how they are "pillars of the Church," how in their external and corporal weakness they are constructing, not only their spiritual temples, but also those of the whole Church?

If only we would understand the power of suffering in the light of the Cross of Our Lord! The Holy Father understands so deeply the value of suffering united to the suffering of Christ, especially in those moments when man is in greater danger due to sin. For in his Marian meditation on May 29th, 1994, after having spent four weeks in the hospital, he told us these words that echo unceasingly in my heart:

"By means of Mary I desire to express today my gratitude for the gift of suffering, associated once again with the Marian month of May. I desire to give thanks for this gift. I have understood that it was a necessary gift. The Pope had to suffer. I have meditated on this through out my time in the hospital. I have reencountered the figure of Cardinal Wyszynski, who, from the beginning of my pontificate told me: 'If the Lord has called you, you must take the Church to the Third Millennium.' I have come to understand that I must take the Church of Christ to the Third Millennium with prayer, with various initiatives, but I have seen that that is not enough: I need to take her with suffering, with this assassination attempt and with all those new sufferings. Why now? Why this year? Because this is the year of the Family. Precisely because the family is in danger, is being attacked, the Pope must also be attacked, the Pope must also suffer, so that everyone in the world may see that there is a gospel, that we can call, superior: the gospel of suffering, with which we are to prepare the future and the Third Millennium." (Angelus, May 29, 1994, no. 4)



The gospel of suffering! Is this not, in fact, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't His Cross, in fact, the most eloquent gospel?

The Blessed Virgin in Fatima asked the small children in Fatima during Her first apparition: "Do you wish to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the suffering that He may be pleased to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and to ask for the conversion of sinners?" My brothers and sisters, let us not waste suffering. Let us unite it with Christ and with His Cross. Let us offer our pains for the good of the Church and for the salvation of many who are far from the Lord.

May this millennium be of the Two Hearts!

In the Love of the Pierced Hearts,

Mother Adela, Foundress SCTJM

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