

## SUFFERING: A MYSTERY OF LOVE AND FECUNDITY IN THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

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Foundress

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"In my flesh," says the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians, "I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church" (1:24). With these words, it seems that St. Paul wanted to reveal a powerful mystery, a treasure of great value that he had found: the meaning and the salvific value of suffering. Even though this was a personal discovery, St. Paul invites us today to discover this hidden treasure. To discover this mystery is to open ourselves to a potency of grace, love, fecundity and unimaginable participation in God's redemptive designs for man and the world.



The Holy Father tells us in his Apostolic Letter *Salvificis Doloris (SD)* that "suffering seems to be, and is, almost inseparable from man's earthly existence" (no. 3).

Suffering is a mystery, a reality inherent in the human condition. It is present in diverse moments of life; it is realized in different ways; it assumes diverse dimensions; nonetheless, in one way or another, it accompanies the life of the human person here on earth in his double dimension - corporal and spiritual.

The Pope has reminded us in this letter that the redemption realized by Christ, at the cost of His passion and death on the Cross, is a decisive and determining event in the history of humanity, not only because it fulfills the divine design of justice and mercy by assuming our sins and paying for them, thus making salvation available for us, but also because the suffering of the God-made-man reveals to man the new meaning of suffering. This is a meaning the human heart has sought to understand incessantly because it has been present to him throughout all history and in all geographic areas, and it finds its most eloquent expression only in the Cross. God is love, and for this reason the Cross is a sign and mysterious manifestation of His love.

### SUFFERING IS A MYSTERY

What a mystery is suffering, what power is found hidden within the Cross! It is a mystery that is accessible only to those who open their hearts to contemplate the power and the strength of the love manifested in suffering. As St. Paul tells us, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:22-24).

What a mystery! For some the Cross is a scandal, a stumbling block, and for others it is foolish and ridiculous; for many it is weakness, and for others an evil that must be avoided at all times; for some it is a fall and for others an elevation, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Simeon at the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple: "This child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted" (Lk 2:34).

For the simple of heart, for those who raise their hearts beyond their own expectations and earthly desires, for those who allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate their limited understanding with the light of spiritual intelligence, the Cross - suffering - is the *strength of God, the wisdom of God, and the powerful manifestation of the potency of love; it is love to the extreme.*

The announcement of suffering that Simeon prophesized would be a source of fall for some and rise for others. For the Blessed Virgin Mary, who understood that the saving mission of Her Son would take place in the context of suffering and opposition, this announcement was an opportunity of elevation, to give another "fiat" through which she embraced the destiny of Her Son in full communion with Him - "and you yourself a sword will pierce" (Lk 2:35). This is the mystery that our Mother understood, and in imitation and communion with Her Heart, many saints have also understood the same - love, if it is to be true, must always be willing to suffer for the beloved. Saint Clare of Assisi, as a fruit of her life experience, used to say, "Love that is not willing to suffer is not worthy of that name."

Therefore, it is love that is the richest fountain from which to understand the meaning of suffering - something that is and will always be a mystery. In order to discover this mystery, in the measure that it is possible, we need to contemplate the Cross of Christ - the saving love of Christ, who gave Himself for us, to the extreme,

suffering to bring us life: "By his wounds we have been healed" (cf. 1 Pt 2:24). *"The Cross of Christ - the passion - sheds a whole new light upon this mystery, giving another meaning to human suffering in general"* (cf. John Paul II, General Audience, Nov. 9, 1988). In order to understand the deepest meaning of suffering, we must do it from the Cross of Christ, understanding it in the language of oblation, of saving love. From the Cross we contemplate Heaven better.

*"For God so loved the world, that He sent His only Son, so that all those who believe in Him may not perish but have eternal life"* (Jn 3:16). With these words of Christ, we can recognize that the saving action of God is found in *freedom from evil*. This is not only freedom from temporal evil, but above all else, it is freedom from definitive evil and suffering - or in other words, the loss of eternal life, of eternal happiness. The Redeemer conquers evil with good. He overcomes sin by His obedience to death and death on a cross. He overcomes death by resurrecting, by returning to life. He conquers evil by loving unto the extreme and giving His life for humanity on the Cross. He conquers by suffering for love...*"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* (Jn 15:13).

There is no greater love than to give one's life. Suffering by the power of the Cross of Christ has become a revelation of divine love, of a love that is salvific. As the prophet Isaiah tells us, *"There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him...He was...a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity...Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed"* (Is 53:2-5). This prophet describes the following: the sufferings of the Messiah have revealed to us the breadth and the height of divine love that always saves, always frees and always redeems. It is a love that gives itself to the extreme, "stopping at nothing" (words of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret). It is a love that conquers evil doing good, even if that means the cross.

This is why Blessed Mother Teresa told us to *"love until it hurts; for if it hurts, it is a good sign"* (cf. Speech at National Prayer Breakfast, Washington DC, February 3, 1994). Love that is capable of suffering is authentic and powerfully fruitful. How few come to understand this mystery! This is why I unite myself with the words of Christ when He said, *"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike"* (Lk 10:21). It is thanks to these simple and pure hearts that we can come to understand the redemptive strength of love that is capable of embracing generously, freely, and voluntarily the greatest sufferings for the good of many - as our Lord did. "This is my Body...this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many" (Mt. 26:26, 28).

What mystery of love can be discovered in suffering! True love is the love that is willing to give one's life, to suffer for the beloved, to die so that others may have life.

#### **LOVE THAT IS EMBRACED FOR LOVE AND IN LOVE, IS POWERFULLY FECUND**

*"The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ have handed on to the Church and to mankind a specific Gospel of suffering. The Redeemer himself wrote this Gospel, above all by his own suffering accepted in love, so that man 'should not perish but have eternal life.' This suffering, together with the living word of his teaching, became a rich source of life for all those who shared in Jesus' sufferings among the first generation of his disciples and confessors and among those who have come after them down the centuries"* (SD, 25, emphases added).

Only suffering that is embraced and offered for love and in love is fruitful. There is an intrinsic relationship between death and life, between suffering and fruitfulness. In the Gospel of St. John Jesus tells us, *"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit"* (12:24). In the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Holy Father tells us that *"the Gospel of life is brought to fulfillment on the tree of the Cross"* (no. 49). Suffering is, therefore, a mystery of love and life that becomes an invitation on behalf of Christ to follow and collaborate with Him in the salvation of the world and in the final triumph of the forces of good over the forces of evil. Only love creates, and only love is fruitful; the sterility of a soul is due to its selfishness because for us to give life, a generous offering of self is necessary. It is necessary to allow oneself to be pierced so that others may have life. We must expand the heart, open it, and allow it to remain open as Christ did - Christ who allowed His Heart to be pierced and has left it eternally open so that many may come to dwell there. Love that is willing to suffer is fruitful. *"Enlarge the space for your tent...For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; Your descendants shall dispossess the nations and shall people the desolate cities"* (Is 54:2-3). *Love that is capable of allowing itself to be pierced is the one that gives life*.



It is in this dimension of fruitful love, in which suffering is lived in communion with Christ and offered for the good of humanity, that it becomes a fountain of life. It is suffering that is embraced and assumed with love that is capable of giving life. For this reason, the gospel of suffering is fully united to the gospel of life, and these two gospels flow from the gospel of love.

There is a mysterious spiritual fruitfulness in suffering that is embraced and offered for love. This is precisely the grand testimony of the saints who have been able to discover this vast and hidden treasure. Some of them have been called to great heights of oblation self-offering and are thus called "victim souls."

### **VICTIM SOULS: SUFFERING AS A VOCATION**

"The Gospel of suffering, through the experience and words of the Apostles, becomes an inexhaustible source for the ever new generations that succeed one another in the history of the Church. The Gospel of suffering signifies not only the presence of suffering in the Gospel, as one of the themes of the Good News, but also the revelation of **the salvific power and salvific significance of suffering** in Christ's messianic mission and, subsequently, in the mission and vocation of the Church" (SD, 25).

The gospel of suffering is an essential part of the Good News proclaimed by Christ; in other words, suffering has been included within the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven. It has a powerful value, even though this value is hidden and must be discovered. **"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"** (1 Cor 1:18). What is *power*? It is the capacity and force to move something or someone that has weight or resistance. This is the power of the Cross. At the conclusion of his Apostolic letter, the Holy Father states, *"And we ask all you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!"* (SD, 31).

Many men and women in the history of the Church have been called to embrace this 'power' of the gospel of suffering in elevated forms of oblation and offering. Called victim souls, they cooperated in a particular way in the redemptive work of Christ in each generation. The Cross was reproduced in their lives, forming them into victims of love. They embraced the cross for love of Christ, in full communion with Him and in imitation of the Master, offering themselves with Him, in Him and like Him, for the salvation of humanity and for the good of all of the Church.

Yes, for these souls suffering was not only an inevitable experience in human and earthly life, but *for them suffering was a vocation, a call of God, a mission. As the Blessed Virgin Mary would tell Saint Bernadette, "I do not promise happiness in this world, but in the next."* As well, the Virgin Mary invited the children of Fatima with this question: *"Do you want to offer yourselves to God to bear all the sufferings He will send to you in reparation for the sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners?"* *"Yes," they answered, "we want to."* *She replied, "You will have much to suffer, but the grace of God will strengthen you."*

These saints have incarnated, in a particular way, what was prophesized by Isaiah: *"man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity"* (53:3). And even though we are all called to this heroic dimension of love, some are called to great and lofty degrees of oblation love. Saint Padre Pio, the first priest in the history of the Church who bore the stigmata, knew about pains of body and soul. He said, *"Know well that, if God finds pleasure in a soul, He will lead it to greater trials. For this reason, courage! And go forth always, without stopping, on the way of the Cross."* The Angel of Fatima exhorted the small children saying, *"Accept and embrace with submission the sufferings that God will send you so that you can fulfill the designs of mercy that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary have over you."*

Victim souls are called by vocation to a complete donation of self to God, so as to live completely as an offering of reparation and expiation and as a complete immolation to God for the good, protection, and conversion of humanity and the Church. They dispose themselves to live and embrace fully the will of God in order to be efficacious channels of His grace and mercy in their historic moments and in Heaven after they die. They allow themselves to be consumed by God and in God and in the fruitful power of the Cross for the good of souls. As it was said of Anne Catherine Emmerick, *"She lived in perfect communion with the mystery of the life, passion and death of Jesus. Her stigmata are a clear testimony to her existential union with Jesus. Her willingness to suffer had no other foundation but her love of the Cross and her preoccupation for others"* (cf. Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, July 2003, speaking about the confirmation of her miracle for beautification).

These souls not only resign themselves to suffering, but they actively embrace it and receive it without any resistance. They permit the purifying and sanctifying action of God, allowing Him to act even in the deepest recess of their souls so as to eliminate all imperfection that might be an obstacle to perfect conformity with the divine will. They abandon all completely in God: their intelligence, will, feelings, and actions. They become an offering, a living sacrifice. *“Offer your bodies as living hosts, holy and pleasing to God”* (cf. Rom 12:1). This call is not due to human initiative; they themselves do not seek it; it is a direct petition of God, and it requires a mature spirituality and a very deep life of communion with God in order to live it with holiness, heroic virtue, discipline, and the sacrifices the vocation entails. They are souls purified in fire, molded by the cross, transfigured in divine love, exceptionally docile to the power of the Holy Spirit, with a defined mission for which they are to give their lives. They are souls who, like Christ, give their lives with the characteristics of authentic love: *willing and free*. “I lay down my life...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own” (Jn 10:17-18).

*“While the first great chapter of the Gospel of suffering is written down, as the generations pass, by those who suffer persecutions for Christ’s sake, simultaneously another great chapter of this Gospel unfolds through the course of history. This chapter is written by all those who suffer together with Christ, uniting their human sufferings to his salvific suffering”* (SD, 26).

It is a gift of God’s mercy to humanity to call men and women to this offering of victimhood. The history of the Church in the last century has been enriched with many and great chapters of oblation love, written by saints who have offered to suffer and to be channels of grace for a world so in need of divine mercy: Saint Therese, Saint Gemma, Saint Padre Pio, Saint Faustina, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Teresa Newman, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerick, Servant of God Marta Robin, Blessed Alejandrina, Venerable Conchita Armida, Blessed Jacinta and Francisco, and so many others who are still hidden or in the process of being recognized.

Another example is the young boy, Luke John Hooker, who died in 1996 at the age of five in Pennsylvania. When he was still very young, he was diagnosed with cancer, which caused him to come to know suffering. The Holy Spirit taught him about the mystery of suffering; at just four years of age, he was capable of telling his mother to not ask for pain killers because he “had to suffer for sinners.” He contemplated constantly the crucifix; on his stomach there remained a scar in the form of a cross due to an operation he underwent, and he would always paint crosses similar to the one he had. On one particular day, he drew a cross for a religious nun who was visiting him, gave it to her, and said, “You must share it with her other sisters. This is the secret, Sister, to become a saint.” To his father he said that the saints are those who love God very much and do not care about how much they have to suffer for Him. On the day he died, while Mass was being celebrated in his room, he remained with his eyes fixed on the cross and told his mother, “You see the Cross? It has wings to take me to Heaven.”

### **SAINT MARIA FAUSTINA**

Let us dispose ourselves today to read, even if it is briefly, the chapter that St. Faustina wrote in the history of heroic offerings for the good of all humanity and the Church.

#### **Victim Soul of the Merciful Love of the Heart of Christ**

“Oh Jesus, each one of your saints reflects in themselves one of your virtues; I desire to reflect your compassionate Heart full of mercy... *Let Your mercy, O Jesus, be impressed upon my heart and soul like a seal, and this will be my badge in this and the future life*” (Diary, 1242).

During her third year as a novice, Saint Faustina received a revelation of what it would mean to be a victim soul. She wrote in her diary, *“Suffering is a great grace; through suffering the soul becomes like the Savior; in suffering love becomes crystallized; the greater the suffering, the purer the love”* (Diary, 57).

With these words, Jesus prepared Saint Faustina for the vocation within the religious vocation to which she would be called: a victim, a living host...“ *My daughter, I want to instruct you on how you are to rescue souls through sacrifice and prayer...I want to see you as a sacrifice of living love, which only then carries weight before Me. You must be annihilated, destroyed, living as if you were dead in the most secret depths of your being...then will I find in you a pleasing sacrifice, a holocaust...And great will be your power for whomever you intercede*” (Diary, 1767). Then He revealed her call to her: “During the Mass I saw the Lord Jesus nailed on the cross in the midst of great sufferings. A silent cry came from His Heart, and then a moment later He said, “*I thirst. I thirst for salvation of souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners*” (Diary, 1032).



Saint Faustina offered herself as a victim for sinners, and for this reason she suffered many diverse pains. *"I have need of your sufferings to rescue souls"* (Diary, 1612). During a particular moment of adoration, God revealed to Saint Faustina all she would have to suffer: loneliness, poverty, false accusations, the loss of her good name, abandonment, rejection, and many physical sufferings, including the invisible stigmata. When the vision was over, she was filled with sweat on her brow. Aware that this whole mystery depended on her free acceptance, she freely consented to the sacrifice with the full use of her faculties. Later she wrote in her diary, *"Suddenly, when I had consented to the sacrifice with all my heart and all my will, God's presence pervaded me...It seemed to me that I would die of love [at the sight of] His glance"* (Diary, 137).

During the Lent of 1933, she experienced in her heart and body the Passion of the Lord, receiving the invisible stigmata. She narrated: *"On a certain day, during prayer, I saw a great brilliance and, issuing from the brilliance, rays which completely enveloped me. Then suddenly, I felt a terrible pain in my hands, my feet and my side and the thorns of the crown of thorns...but this was only for a brief moment"* (Diary, 759).

Sometime later, St. Faustina became ill with tuberculosis. She experienced once again the sufferings of the Lord's Passion, which repeated itself every Friday and sometimes when she found a soul that was not in the state of grace. These sufferings were usually of short duration, but they were so painful that she would not have been able to support them without a special grace of God.

The Diary of St. Faustina is an extensive lesson on suffering and its salvific value. Through the diary we are able to discover her life of offering that was lived in a natural and serene manner. She fulfilled faithfully all of her duties in the convent without calling attention to herself or manifesting anything extraordinary in the apparent monotony of her daily life. This hidden life is characteristic of victim souls. United to the Eucharistic sacrifice, they live a generous, hidden life of heroic charity. They are victims of love, of charity that knows no limits, and even of a love greater than death, which is why their offerings also reaches the souls in purgatory. Let us find in this Diary some examples of her victimhood for souls.

#### **For Poland, detaining the punishments from her country**

*"My beloved native land, Poland, if you only knew how many sacrifices and prayers I offer to God for you!"* (Diary, 1038).

*"One day Jesus told me that He would cause a chastisement to fall upon the most beautiful city in our country [probably Warsaw]. This chastisement would be that with which God had punished Sodom and Gomorrah. I saw the great wrath of God and a shudder pierced my heart. I prayed in silence. After a moment, Jesus said to me, **My child, unite yourself closely to Me during the Sacrifice and offer My Blood and My Wounds to My Father in expiation for the sins of that city. Repeat this without interruption throughout the entire Holy Mass. Do this for seven days. On the seventh day I saw Jesus in a bright cloud and began to beg Him to look upon the city and upon our whole country. Jesus looked [down] graciously. When I saw the kindness of Jesus, I began to beg His blessing. Immediately Jesus said, For your sake I bless the entire country"*** (Diary, 39).

#### **For Russia**

*"I have offered this day for Russia. I have offered all my sufferings and prayers for that poor country. After Holy Communion, Jesus said to me, **I cannot suffer that country any longer. Do not tie my hands, My daughter.** I understood that if it had not been for the prayers of souls that are pleasing to God, that whole nation would have already been reduced to nothingness. Oh, how I suffer for that nation which has banished God from its borders!"* (Diary, 818).

#### **For Priests**

*"I have offered this day for priests. I have suffered more today than ever before, both interiorly and exteriorly. I did not know it was possible to suffer so much in one day. I tried to make a Holy Hour, in the course of which my spirit had a taste of the bitterness of the Garden of Gethsemane"* (Diary, 823).

#### **In Expiation for the sins of the world**

*"The last two days of carnival. My physical sufferings have intensified. I am uniting myself more closely with the suffering Savior, asking Him for mercy for the whole world, which is running riot in its wickedness. Throughout the day I felt the pain of the crown of thorns. When I lay down, I could not rest my head on the pillow"* (Diary, 1619).

*"I unite my sufferings, my bitterness and my last agony itself to Your Sacred Passion; and I offer myself for the whole world to implore an abundance of God's mercy for souls, and in particular for the souls who are in our*

homes" (Diary, 1574).

### **The Stigmata:**

#### **For those who are not in grace**

"I suffer great pain in my hands, feet and side, the places where Jesus' body was pierced. I experience these pains particularly when I meet with a soul who is not in the state of grace" (Diary, 705).

#### **For dying souls**

"Today I felt the Lord's Passion in my body more than at any other time. I felt this was for the sake of a dying soul" (Diary, 1724).

#### **For the conversion of sinners**

"Today I felt the Passion of Jesus in my whole body, and the Lord gave me knowledge of the conversion of certain souls" (Diary, 1627).

"A certain person came to the door today...During the conversation which I had with her, the Passion of Jesus was renewed in me...For three days I suffered much on her account" (Diary, 1305).

#### **She was awakened to pray and suffer for the dying**

"During the night, I was suddenly awakened and knew that some soul was asking me for prayer, and that it was in much need of prayer. Briefly, but with all my soul, I asked the Lord for grace for her...The following afternoon, when I entered the ward, I saw someone dying, and learned that the agony had started during the night...at the time when I had been asked for prayer. And just then, I heard a voice in my soul: **Say the chaplet which I taught you...**I began to say the chaplet. Suddenly the dying person opened her eyes and looked at me...she died, with extraordinary peace... That was the first soul to receive the benefit of the Lord's promise [of the chaplet]" (Diary 809-810).

"My Guardian Angel told me to pray for a certain soul, and in the morning I learned that it was a man whose agony had begun that very moment. The Lord Jesus makes it known to me in a special way when someone is in need of my prayer. I especially know when my prayer is needed by a dying soul" (Diary, 820).

#### **For the souls in purgatory**

"One night, a soul of a young girl came to see me and made me feel her presence, letting me know that she needed my prayers and sacrifices. I understood that she was in purgatory and I offered the indulgences on the following day for her" (cf. Diary, 1723).

"One night the soul of one of the deceased sisters came to me. The first time I saw that she was in the state of great suffering, and then gradually these sufferings had diminished; this time she was radiant with happiness, and she told me she was already in heaven...She came to me to thank me for having freed her from purgatory" (cf. Diary, 594).

"This evening, one of the deceased sisters came and asked me for one day of fasting and to offer all my [spiritual] exercises on that day for her" (Diary, 1185).

#### **For the protection of the world**

"If you did not tie My hands, I would send down many punishments upon the earth. My daughter, your look disarms My anger...you call out to Me so mightily that all heaven is moved. I cannot escape from your requests" (Diary, 1722).

#### **For the pains of abortion**

"At eight o'clock, I experienced such violent pains that I had to lay down immediately; I have been convulsing for three hours because of these pains and there is no medicine that can alleviate them. Jesus has made me understand that He has allowed these sufferings in reparation to God for the souls that are murdered in the wombs of their mothers. These pains have happened to me three times already" (cf. Diary, 1276).

#### **Interior agony**

He asked her to live them in loneliness. "In your physical as well as your mental sufferings, my daughter, do not seek sympathy from creatures. I want the fragrance of your suffering to be pure and unadulterated. I want you to detach yourself, not only from creatures, but also from yourself" (Diary, 279).

"I spent the whole night with Jesus in Gethsemane. From my breast there escaped one continuous moan. A

natural dying will be much easier, because then one is in agony and will die; while here, one is in agony, but cannot die. O Jesus, I never thought such suffering could exist" (Diary, 1558).

She suffered rejection, judgments, ridicule, abandonment, incomprehension and the temptations and revenge of the devil.

"When I left the confessional, a multitude of thoughts oppressed my soul" (Diary, 644). The devil would tell her, "why should you be sincere with your confessor?" She constantly heard voices in her interior that wanted to torment her. Satan ridiculed her and would laugh at her compassion for souls, saying, "Look at how you suffer...and you are going to continue suffering? What is your reward for this suffering?"

#### **Her Reward: the Conversion of Many Sinners**

"During the rosary today, I suddenly saw a ciborium with the Blessed Sacrament. The ciborium was uncovered and quite filled with hosts. From the ciborium came a voice: **These hosts have been received by souls converted through your prayer and suffering**" (Diary, 709).

We have seen some examples of what a life - having embraced out of love the vocation to suffering - can achieve for the good of humanity. This heroic generosity can only come from the strength of the crucified love of Christ, from Him who has given Himself for us, who has overcome evil with the force of good. Love triumphs because love that is capable of suffering is the only love that is fruitful. Only love is capable of opening and stretching the heart in order to engender the life of Christ in the world. Thank you, St. Faustina, for manifesting with your life what was taught to us by St. Frances de Sales: "the limit of love is to love without limits."

#### **Substitution**

It is love that moves the lover to take the place of the beloved in order to save her. This is what Christ has done for us: He took our place on the Cross and paid for our sins.

Is not the prayer that the Angel taught the children of Fatima a call to expiate for the sins of others? "I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you; and I ask forgiveness for those who do not believe, who do not adore, who do not hope and who do not love you."

Praying in her convent in Cologne during a holy hour on a First Friday, Saint Edith Stein (St. Benedicta of the Cross) came to understand the significance of the torments that had been initiated by Hitler to the Jewish people. She wrote, "I talked with the Savior and told Him that I knew it was His cross that was now being placed upon the Jewish people; that most of them did not understand this, but that those who did, would have to take it up willingly in the name of all. I would do that. He should only show me how" (*Edith Stein: Selected Writings*, 17). Edith Stein was conscious of her vocation as a Jewish convert to Catholicism: "Many will not understand the terrible significance of this suffering; by a special grace I have understood it and I say, 'Here I am, Lord.'" A few days later, she was arrested and was taken to the concentration camp where she died as a martyr and a victim soul in the gas chamber.

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