

- Every canonized saint in Heaven is someone who suffered much in this life, and who imitated Christ in heroic ways.
- And that's why we Catholics instinctively turn to them, for they show us how to deal with the trials of this earthly life so as to prepare ourselves for the joys of the next life.
- The saints who experienced betrayal or an intense suffering inflicted by a loved one are particularly heroic, for such injustice can be a most excruciating form of suffering.
- One saint that I love in this regard is St. Catherine of Genoa. St. Catherine was married to a violently-tempered and unfaithful man, who not only fathered a child with another woman, but who also foolishly spent their entire fortune and left them penniless.
- For 10 years Catherine suffered tremendously with her husband, sometimes silently, sometimes pursuing worldly pleasures, but after a moment of extraordinary grace in which she saw her own sinfulness as well as God's love, she was changed.
- Instead of divorcing her husband, as worldly wisdom would have incited her to do, St. Catherine was moved to love her husband and shower him (and the mistress) with charity and forgiveness. She even took in the child of his adulterous union!
- Catherine's saintly behavior eventually brought her husband to repentance and conversion. That's the good fruit that can be reaped when we embrace the hard toil of suffering, and when we move beyond our own sense of justice so as to forgive and love.
- Last Sunday I mentioned how, as Christians, we cannot be like everyone else in the world. While most people think of themselves before others, and are intent upon satiating their every desire, living a comfortable life, and avoiding suffering, we cannot be that way.
- With our eyes constantly fixed on Christ and on the world to come, we must learn to embrace our sufferings in this life as handmade gifts from God Himself.
- Suffering is a gift because it helps free us from self-delusion, from over-reliance on self, and when embraced, it leads to a much deeper understanding of how much we need God, and how it is only in God that we will ever find peace.
- Today our readings call us to distinguish ourselves from worldly ways even more intently. We are told that, not only should we embrace our sufferings, but to love those who cause us suffering and to do good to them. Jesus tells us: "...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."
- To those who strike our cheek, we are to offer the other cheek as well. To the one who takes our cloak, we are to give them our tunic as well, and not demand back what is taken from us. We are even supposed to lend money without expecting repayment.
- To the worldly of heart and mind, this type of attitude is complete lunacy.
- Yet in our first reading we are given the great example of David, who refused to lay a hand on King Saul, even though Saul was seeking his life and wanted to kill him.
- David refuses to think only of his own benefit, and he has a proper fear of God. If David were a lesser man and a slave to worldly ways, he would have slew Saul in his sleep.
- Yet because of his faithfulness and love for God, David acted in a way that gave glory to God, proclaiming that "the Lord will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness."
- For most people, behaving in this way is unthinkable. Yet this is what it means to be Christian. Being a Christian means practicing charity and forgiveness, most especially with our enemies, and being willing to suffer rather than cause suffering to others.

- Truly, if we act like everyone else in the world, does not Christianity lose its meaning? If God has called us to be salt and light in the world, how can we feel good about being indistinguishable from everyone else – including those who deny our Lord?
- As the world becomes more worldly, it becomes harder to stand out by our Christian convictions – especially when Christians' values are mocked and even labeled as hate.
- Yet when, like David, we seek to act in a manner that glorifies the Lord, God takes notice.
- In every situation we find ourselves, our Lord “knows the score.” What I mean by that is that our Lord knows when we’re trying to exercise virtue and sees our interior struggles.
- God knows our pains and sufferings, and how we strive to embrace them. He knows how just difficult it is for us to love our enemy, to love someone who has hurt or wronged us, to turn the other cheek, and to lend without expecting repayment.
- Yet how we exercise the virtues, especially justice and charity, will help determine our eternity. As Jesus tells us today: “For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”
- But as we wrestle with the difficulty of putting this Gospel into practice, we must – like St. Catherine of Genoa – first remember our own sinfulness, and then remember that acting this way is how God *always* acts with us, despite how we’ve offended Him by our sins.
- Christ can tell us to love our enemies and do good to them, because He did that very thing. He can tell us to be merciful, to stop judging, to stop condemning, to forgive and give generously because He practiced all of these things in His earthly life.
- And He continues to practice all this with us even now.
- Our Lord’s willingness to take care of the needs of others at the expense of His own desire for rest, His willingness to forgive and show mercy even to those who crucified Him, and to continually forgive us when we ask, gives us a glimpse of His great love for us.
- And it provides the measure for how we are to act with others. It shows us the high bar of charity for which our Lord wants us to strive.
- Very soon Lent will be upon us. This is a time for us to take stock of our sins and repent.
- But the season of Lent isn’t simply about repentance. It’s also about learning to be one of Christ’s true disciples. It’s about learning to be like Christ. And this always requires learning to embrace our sufferings.
- But it also means learning to practice charity as Christ practiced it: loving and serving His enemies, willingly forgiving them, and humbly embracing the injustices heaped upon Him.
- If we wish to be our Lord’s true disciples, we must be willing to say yes to God even when it requires a great deal of suffering, even when we have to find the magnanimity to give to our enemies that which they have denied to us.
- Brothers and sisters, ask yourself: when I meet Christ as my judge, will He find in my actions the same selfless and generous charity that He so willingly offers?
- As our world becomes ever more godless and inhumane, let us not despair or grow bitter. But let us resolve ever more strongly to be like Christ in our dealings with others, especially those who hate us.
- May we be willing to love without counting the cost, to give without expectation of repayment, and to forgive all who offend or hurt us. And let us trust that by our faithful exercise of mercy, we shall be shown mercy in return by our Lord.
- St. Catherine of Genoa, pray for us.