

- There is much suffering in our world today. In our parish this past week, we buried a 16-year-old who died from cancer. In our country, we suffered yet another school shooting, leaving 6 innocent people dead.
- In our world, the war between Russia and the Ukraine continues, and Christians in so many places continue to be persecuted with brutality.
- In our Church, we have dozens of German bishops trying to change the Church's moral teachings on sexuality, while other Church leaders are trying to sideline the Latin Mass, and are using draconian tactics to do so.
- Considering these sufferings, it's pretty easy to get a little depressed, isn't it?
- Yet, suffering has a place in God's permissive will, for when borne with faith and hope in God, suffering helps us grow in humility and charity. It can soften our hearts and minds so that we become more patient, compassionate, and magnanimous.
- Of course, suffering is the main theme of our readings today, most especially the suffering of our Blessed Lord. But if we restrict our reflections this week to only our *Lord's* sufferings, we will fail to fully realize the graces being held out to us.
- You see, my brothers and sisters, as Christians we are called to imitate our Lord in every way. To be *Christian* means to be *Christ-like*.
- And if we are going to live lives that are authentically and fully *Christian*, we must be willing to imitate Christ in the most important thing that He did for mankind, which was to suffer for us.
- This means we must be willing to embrace suffering, just as Jesus embraced His sufferings, even unto death.
- Jesus accomplished many things during His 33 years on earth: He was a teacher, a healer, a man of both gentle kindness and bold conviction. But most importantly, He was a Savior, a Savior who chose to suffer and die for His people.
- It was His suffering that made Jesus *the Christ*, and if we are going to be Christians in the truest sense of the word, then we must be willing to embrace our sufferings, too.
- This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said that His followers must be willing to take up their crosses and follow Him. This is true now as much as it ever was.
- As the indomitable Mother Angelica once quipped: "Holiness is not wimps, and the cross isn't negotiable – it's a requirement."
- She's got a point! So often in life we stand at the foot of Calvary. The question is: are we willing to climb it with our Lord?
- So often crosses are presented to us, sometimes as consequences of our own bad decisions; other times, they come out of the blue, or we suffer unjustly at the hands of others. The question is: are we willing to embrace our crosses?
- Why is embracing our crosses and bearing our sufferings important?
- Because doing so is the path of redemption. Embracing our crosses is the narrow road that alone leads to Heaven. Again, as Mother Angelica said, it's a requirement!
- It is through our sufferings, borne with faith, hope, and charity and offered in union with our Lord's suffering on the cross, that our Lord enables us to make reparation for our sins, grow in virtue, and participate in the redemption of all of mankind.

- And if we aren't willing to suffering in this life, we will suffer in the next, whether that be in Purgatory, or eternally in hell.
- As we look around our world and even our Church today, as we see violence, injustice, and malice, it's easy for us to feel anger and frustration, sadness and despair.
- But, as Christians, we can't allow ourselves to go there, especially in this most holy week of the year.
- No, this week – more than any other week of the year – is a time for us to resolve to climb Calvary with Jesus, embracing whatever crosses God allows in our lives.
- So, whatever personal sufferings you're enduring right now, look upon them with the eyes of faith, and embrace them. And know that for the generous soul who graciously accepts his or her sufferings, God's grace is never lacking. And God's grace is sufficient.
- Moreover, our Lord's own passion and death show us that God can bring the greatest good out of the gravest evil when we willingly carry our crosses.
- So, as we enter another Holy Week, may we each be willing to embrace our crosses with faith, hope, and charity, so that our personal sufferings, as well as the sufferings of this time in history, may conform us more closely to Christ on the Cross.
- And being conformed to our Lord's crucifixion, may we be assured of one day being conformed to His resurrection. Amen.