

**Deacon Mike Sermon for March 26, 2017**

Read the long version of John 9

There was a Chinese peasant who lived in a small village with his wife and a teenage son.

Through much hard work, he was able to buy a horse. “You are so fortunate to have such a fine mare”, said the villagers.

“I am only a human, and only god knows of good fortune,” replied the old man.

One day the mare ran away. “How unfortunate,” said the villagers?

“I accept the judgment of god,” said the old man.

Some days later, the mare returned, followed by a fine stallion.

“Now you have two fine horses. You are a lucky man!,” cried the townspeople.

I know that only god knows,” said the old man.

The old man’s son decided that he would break the stallion so that it would be able to help with the farm work;

He was thrown off and broke his leg in six places, making him limp very badly.

““Now your beloved son is lame for life,” said the villagers.

“Only god knows why, “said the old man.

Weeks passed, and a company of soldiers came to the village and took away all of the young men to fight in the army---all but the lame young man.

The villager gathered at the old man's house to congratulate him on his good fortune at being able to keep his son,

"You were right," they said".

"Only god really knows .....what purpose is there in suffering....."

Just imagine being disabled, living in a Hebrew culture.

For centuries they had interpreted the Old Testament to teach that suffering in any way comes from sinning, or having parents who had sinned.

It was clear in the remarks of the Apostles when they asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?"

Yet when asked, Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him."

This was a game changer.

Suffering, like all human things, finds its true meaning in Jesus Christ.

It is both a burden and a joy.

Why it is a burden is easy to understand.

Why it is a joy requires a reflection on the how Jesus redeemed us.

Thus our redemption is directly related to Christ's suffering, and our suffering is linked to our own redemption.

Because the Church is the Body of Christ, that Body must share in the sufferings of Christ Himself.

As St. Paul wrote, we “complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, the Church”.

This means that every man and woman’s suffering is joined with the Passion and death of our Lord!

We must see that our suffering as in some way being on the cross or carrying the cross with Christ!

Christ leaves this redemptive suffering open so that it can be completed in us.

It is quite possible that our Christ-like participation in suffering is the most powerful prayer we may offer outside of the sacraments!

There is a “Gospel of Suffering” that is being written by the witnesses of Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection to this very day.

Christ told his disciples to bear hardships, carry their own cross, and deny themselves and follow Him.

The promise of suffering, often in the form of persecution for Christ, requires fortitude and courage, placing hope in Christ and His victory over the world through His suffering.

Suffering in Christ enables an inner revelation to take place.

It conceals a powerful grace which draws a person closer to Christ, resulting in a deeper conversion by which a person is changed to the core!

Suffering in the Body also creates the opportunity for a display of spiritual heroism, setting an example of perseverance for others.

Uniting ourselves to Christ, does not come easily, because of the great question “Why suffering?”

But Jesus answers this question from the cross, saying, “Take up your cross and come follow me.”

In this way, the meaning of suffering is revealed.

Suffering can be a source of joy because, with its meaning uncovered, it is no longer an experience in life to be feared and thought useless and burden to others.

Rather, the one who is suffering is actually doing their part to complete the sufferings of Christ for His Body, the Church.

Responding to suffering also provides us an opportunity for grace for ourselves and others.

The parable of the Good Samaritan in answering the question “who is my neighbor?” teaches that love of neighbor means sensitivity to those who suffer.

This must include sympathy and compassion, but extends most importantly to a call to action.

The Good Samaritan gave his all, even his very self, for the suffering other.

This self-giving is at the core of who we are as the Body of Christ from the beginning.

Add to this the Christian virtues especially charity which together overcomes indifference to suffering.

As we dwell on the plight and healing of the Blind man, Christ's words in Matthew 25:31-46 provide a final perspective on suffering:

In ministering to one who is suffering, we ultimately minister to Christ.

All human suffering is an opportunity to serve Christ as we ought, which will be taken into account on our day of Judgment.

It is revealed to be a conduit of grace, both for the one suffering and the one who ministers!

Suffering is supernatural because God has bound it up with salvation and is human because it is experienced by all of humanity.

Through human suffering, we find our identity in ourselves and in Christ.

Remember, that there is purpose in suffering if only we will use it! Jesus did!

In closing,

How would we have responded to the plight of the blind Man?

Amen!

