

**February 1, 2015**

**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts**

*“Those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music” Friedrich Nietzsche*

**Reflections on Suffering**

I’ve become aware as I look back over these past three Sundays that we have had what amounts to a series of three homilies on “Grief and Loss”. The first was on how suffering creates the space, the womb, within us in which Christ can be born; that suffering comes from God hovering over us and stretching us to make room for God’s own Self within us. And that hurts.

Last Sunday, we looked at how Christ lifts us up to the level of his cross so that he can share in our suffering.

Today we will consider how in sharing in Christ’s suffering, we actually participate in his work to save the world.

**If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts**

Suffering can harden the heart, we all know. Pope Francis says we can avoid this. I read this in an article in the National Catholic Reporter of December 30th titled, *“If you don't learn how to weep, you're not a good Christian.”* I would like to share some of his thoughts with you.

**Pope Francis on why we suffer**

“The most extraordinary event of the pope's Asian tour was [his encounter with a weeping 12-year-old Filipina](#) who asked why God lets bad things happen to innocent children. ‘*Why did God let this happen to us?*’ she asked the pope, covering her face with her hands as she sobbed. ‘*There are many children neglected by their own parents. There are also many who became victims and many terrible things happened to them. Why is God allowing such things to happen, even if it is not the fault of the children? And why are there only very few people helping us?*’”

We all know this feeling, and we also know the canned explanations that are sometimes offered, all with the best of intentions, such as:

*“It's God's will”  
“God has a plan”  
“S/he will be happy in heaven”  
“We have to bear the cross God gives us”*

These may be true, but they really don't help much, do they. The issue isn't a lack of knowledge, it's a lack of emotional support and strength.

The article goes on: “The pope first applauded the girl for expressing herself so courageously, but he did not respond with a theological lecture on the mystery of evil. Rather, he affirmed her tears saying, *‘Only when we are able to weep about the things that you lived can we understand something and answer something.’*”

“He acknowledged this is the great question: *‘Why do we suffer?’* The answer is not to be found in the head, but in the heart, *“Only when the heart is able to ask the question and weep can we understand something. It was only when Christ wept and was able to weep that he understood our hurts. Today's world needs to weep, the marginalized need to weep, those left aside need to weep, the scorned need to weep. But if we live a life more or less without needs, we don't know how to weep. Certain realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears.”*

*“So why do we suffer? The great answer we can all give is to learn to weep. Jesus wept for his dead friend; he wept in his heart for that family that had lost their daughter; he wept when he saw that mother, a poor widow, taking her son to be buried; he wept when he saw the multitudes like sheep without a shepherd. Being a good Christian is learning how to weep.”*

“The mother of Jesus wept at the foot of the cross, and that is why through the centuries women who have lost their children through sickness, accidents, wars, and natural disasters have turned to Our Lady of Sorrows for comfort. She lost a child. She understands. Only when we weep can we can understand.

“Jesus did not come to explain suffering but to weep with us and to suffer with us. The cross is more than reparation for sin, it is God's way of joining us in our suffering. Instead of preaching from the sidelines, Jesus gets down in the dirt and suffers with us.

“In conclusion, Francis says, *‘When we are asked, ‘Why do we suffer? Why does this or that happen, this tragic thing in life?’ May our answer be, ‘Be courageous; don't be afraid to cry.’*”

### **So what have we seen?**

*Suffering makes us more ready to let go of our separateness. It opens the heart to something more, something greater - God. Every tear brings the Messiah closer.*

*Christ doesn't so much reach out to us from the Cross in our suffering as he does to*

*incorporate our suffering into his.  
Tears of suffering cleanse our eyes to see that being incorporated into Christ's  
suffering is to share in his work to save the world.*

### **So why do we need to weep?**

The Cross is the suffering of all humanity. The answer to the problem of evil, to why we suffer, does not come from the mind, it comes from the heart. The answer to why do we suffer is - "to weep"; it is in weeping that our hearts are stretched to be able to carry the pain of the world. Weeping cleanses our eyes to see that it is in suffering that God becomes visible. Tears give birth to the Reign of God; they bring the Messiah closer. Let us not be afraid to weep, because:

### **In tears we hear God's voice, and our hearts will never be hardened**

*Those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane  
by those who could not hear the music*