

+JMJ+

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Following upon the themes I spoke of last week, concerning the relationship between our baptism and that of suffering, we would do well to consider, in even greater depth, the **NAME** we can give to this suffering, and whether this name, in light of our *willingness* to take ownership of it, is efficacious of anything beneficial for us.

*Sufferre* is the Latin infinitive which means *to suffer* (this one does not require a Latin education to figure out!). While the more obvious definitions do not require much explication (i.e., to undergo, to bear, to endure, etc.), there are other definitions which present us with greater insight into what it means to suffer *as a Christian*. Let us then consider the notion of suffering as an opportunity to **OFFER**. In our willingness to not merely undergo, but to *accept* emotional or even physical pain (whether it be a circumstance of natural evil, or a moral evil done to us), we have at least two choices: we may accept it as if it had no effective value (which is really no acceptance of it at all), or we may accept it by recognizing its possible **redemptive value**, and thus offer it as a recompense for something outside of us. The obvious question here is, what and how can my acceptance of suffering be redemptive?

First of all, we must return to our first question: what name shall we assign to this suffering? Let us consider the fact that in order to suffer, we must acknowledge that by doing so, we are giving up something of ourselves. We give up our peace, our well-being, or an ability. We relent to the fact that someone or something outside of us, has denied us one of those things. We further recognize that this external cause of our suffering will forever remain the cause of that suffering; even though that suffering may not be everlasting, during the remainder of our earthly life. Nevertheless, is it not so that we will remain, in a manner of speaking, a **SLAVE** of that cause of our suffering? For do we not have any choice but to be forced to obey the fact that we were deprived of something by the cause of our suffering? If, then, we acknowledge our status as SLAVES of the cause of our sufferings, can we then speak of anything beneficial for us in our role as “slaves”? The typical answer many people will say is, NO WAY! After all, isn’t the great tragedy of being a slave, the fact that one gives up FREEDOM, and that in not having freedom, this becomes the object of our suffering? The simple answer is, YES and NO.

The answer is YES, *if* in our being a slave, we allow ourselves to be, as St. Paul warned us NOT to be, a **slave “of human masters”** (1 Cor 7:23); or even more broadly, a slave of anything material and finite, or even of that which is devoid of being. For in our giving up of freedom to anything created or non-existent (in order to relieve suffering), we relinquish our soul to **an object that is not capable of bestowing TRUE FREEDOM**, but perhaps only a seeming, temporal notion of “freedom”. In this scenario, we thus find ourselves NOT truly free, but in reality, retaining the actual character of what it means to be a “slave”—one who is being deprived of the very goal of his/her existence: happiness.

But if our answer is NO, then *if* in our being a slave, we allow ourselves to be **a slave of and for Jesus Christ**, and thus the Son of the one, true God, then we relinquish our soul to an object Who is not *merely capable* of bestowing true freedom, but **WILL bestow it**. But He will only bestow it, *if* we are a “freed person belonging to the Lord” (1 Cor 7:22). And inasmuch as we TRULY belong to the Lord, WILLINGLY, yet as *His* slave, may we undergo our earthly sufferings with a supernatural JOY, as an acceptance and OFFERING, in exchange for the divine promise of eternal beatitude.

Let me end by quoting from Homily #19 by St. John Chrysostom:

Such is the nature of Christianity: even in slavery it bestows freedom. If someone claimed to have an immortal body, he would have to prove his claim by being shot with an arrow and suffering no harm. Likewise, a man shows **he is truly free when his spirit remains unfettered even though he is subject to masters.**

In Christ through Mary,  
Mr. Andrew M. Steele