

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the catechesis presented here last week, one of the principles laid out concerning a **redemptive** act of suffering, is that, conditional to a person's taking on of this suffering, are the further acts of **acceptance** and **offering**. But what if one were to *only accept*, but not offer? To remove the notion of offering, would be to only accept the suffering from the point of view of cause and effect; for example, one accepts the fact that an emotional or physical pain has become a reality, and that this pain is merely the effect of a given cause. Here, there is NO understanding of **purpose** behind the suffering. The very presence of suffering is the only focal point for such person. Let me ask you, then: is it not true that such a person has thus become a slave to himself? A slave to his condition? A slave to despair? If so, then what hope of **freedom** could possibly be had in such a scenario, **unless something new be added to such person's understanding?**

If, however, we allow for an act of **offering** to flow from an act of acceptance, we have a very different outcome; for upon *accepting* any suffering, if we were to then recognize it as an **occasion or opportunity** to carry the Cross with Jesus, and die on that Cross with Jesus, then we would no longer turn inward and focus on ourselves and the things we have not, but instead, we would turn **OUTWARD**, and gaze upon the multitude of gifts given to us, and thus truly live out our "baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

And thus, in becoming a slave for Christ, *only then* are we able to merit our TRUE FREEDOM in eternity. So, then, what does St. Paul tell us is the reason why we should rejoice or even boast in our sufferings? Because in doing so, "that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

Although what I have just laid out is a summary of what has already been presented from my previous columns, I believe it to be important that I give you this recapitulation, so that a clearer understanding of the principles involved may be had; particularly, when it comes to how we are called to respond to matters that provoke us in a negative way. What do I mean by this?

It sometimes happens that, whenever certain doctrines of the faith are laid out, some people will either take offense to them immediately, or they will put up some resistance. They will do this, not necessarily because they disagree with the doctrine *absolutely speaking* (although many do as well), but they will disagree with it from a **subjective point of view**, inasmuch as any thought of acceptance would immediately place fault, and thus suffering, onto themselves. To be fair, however, it may only be an *intellectual* barrier which causes this offense or resistance to truth, but if it is both a problem of one's **intellect and will**, then it is easier to see where a breakdown of any semblance of a Christ-like frame of mind is had. In this scenario, such person would have no understanding of why they are undergoing this suffering, and in fact, would argue that they should NOT have to undergo this suffering at all, and fall into the trap of believing there is no purpose had in the acceptance of suffering. What is not necessarily important here is who or what the cause of the suffering is. **What is important, is our RESPONSE to the suffering.**

Does our response contain recourse to **TRUTH as it exists in reality**, or does our response rely on that inward movement to ourselves, wherein we seek only an *apparent truth* which we conjure up in our mind, and that has no or little conformity with **TRUTH** as God knows it? A person, who when confronted with the truths of the faith, finds themselves at odds with such truths, has a **choice** to make: they may either persist in their non-redemptive suffering by NOT disposing themselves of the truth, and therefore NOT accept the objective nature of their actions as sinful (if that is the case), or they may accept their suffering in a redemptive way—and thus give purpose to their suffering—by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and making the conscious choice to follow Christ (cf., Luke 9:23).

In Christ through Mary,
Mr. Andrew M. Steele