

# Rejoicing in the sufferings

St. Paul tells the Colossians: **“I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the Church”** (Col.1.24)

We can rejoice in the sufferings only when we realise the divine purpose of suffering, the end result of it. Once a mother of seven children was frying potatoes in the kitchen. After frying the potatoes, there was some oil left over and the mother wanted to pour the oil in the courtyard. The children were playing in the courtyard. The eldest daughter was about 13 years old and the youngest 3 years old. Seeing the mother coming out of the kitchen, the three year old child ran towards her. The eldest daughter, who was standing in the back, realised that when the mother pours the oil, it would fall on the little child. So instantly she jumped towards the little one, and pushed her aside. Without realising anything, the mother poured the oil, and it fell on the face of the eldest daughter. They did not have a car and it took some time for her to be taken to the hospital. But all the while, the words which came out from her mouth were: “Lord, I thank you; O Jesus, I thank you”. We can imagine the pain she underwent, when the hot oil covered her face. But quite unmindful of that, she was thanking the Lord because she could save her small sister from the agony!

✘ Yes, there is a divine purpose behind every suffering we go through and when we realise it, we can accept the sufferings. In the Gospel of Luke, in chapter 23, we see the scene of three crosses on Mount Calvary. The two thieves were hanging on either side of Jesus. The one on the left hand side was challenging Jesus: “Are you not Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

***Calvary*** – Karel Dujardin (WGoA)

Whereas the other one said: "We indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong" (39-41). Here we understand the two types of suffering which we may go through. **When we go 'off-track' from the Word of God, lead lives rejecting God and His Word, disobey His commandments, we have to face the consequences. But it is a call for our repentance. God says: "I reprove and discipline those who I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent"** (Rev. 3.19). Since "nothing unclean will enter the kingdom of God" (Rev.21.27), the loving God who wants all to enter into His life, here and hereafter, permits us to go through the 'deserved' or 'just' sufferings, "for gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir. 2.5). So King David acknowledges humbly, "it is good for me that I was afflicted, so that I might learn your statutes" (Ps. 119. 71). So in our sufferings let us realise that our loving God the Father is "disciplining us for our good, as a parent would discipline the child, in order that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12. 5- 10).

The thief on the right side pointed out that 'Jesus has done nothing wrong'. Yes, He undertook the suffering on behalf of the sinful humanity. He paid the debt which we had to pay. So it was the 'suffering for the sake of others'. St. Paul recognised this truth and realising the purpose of his suffering, he was rejoicing in the 'afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger, in dishonour and the like (2 Cor. 6 4-10). He was ready to go through 'the pain of childbirth until Christ was formed in' all (Gal. 4.19). Let us also rejoice when we are hated, persecuted, alienated, scoffed at, evil given back for the good that we do to others etc, for in such moments we are getting a chance to share in Christ's sufferings, who suffered not for his faults, but he was ready to 'repair the wall and stand in the breach between the Holy God and sinful humanity' (Ez. 22.30). His was the 'undeserved' or 'unjust' suffering. St. Therese of Lisieux said: **"We can gain more**

**souls for Christ through our day to day sufferings than through our preaching. As the Holy Spirit reveals through St. Paul, let us recognise that 'suffering is a grace, a privilege'** (Phil.1. 29). Let us unite our sufferings with that of Christ and offer them to the heavenly Father in atonement for our own sins and for many who are going away from faith.

In the early Church the Apostles strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in faith, saying "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts. 14.22). Let us 'walk as Jesus walked' (1. Jn. 2.6); let us make our sufferings 'redeeming sufferings' like that of Jesus, who 'came to give His life a ransom for many' (Mk. 10.45). Only in this, we can find meaning and joy in our sufferings. May the Holy Spirit of God enlighten our minds, fill us with divine wisdom, courage and fortitude.

Mary Pereira.