

Jesus Suffered

“For our sake, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried”

Introduction

Gospel Reflection

Matthew 16:21-27 (NABWRNT)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.

²² Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”

²³ He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

²⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

²⁶ What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?

²⁷ For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.

The Gospel of the Lord

Level-Setting: Compare These Images:

- Moses and the Burning Bush
- The birth of Jesus in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes
- Jesus suffering and dying on the cross (*The Passion of the Christ*, Gibson)

Question: Why did Jesus have to suffer?

God’s Divine Plan for Humankind

- God’s desire is “to raise men to a participation of the divine life”¹
- Man is made in the “image and likeness of God” (Gn 1:26)
 - Image: the soul
 - Likeness: unity with God through obedience
- Jesus describes this desired unity in his highly-priestly prayer (John 17):
 - “And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that

¹*Lumen Gentium* ¶ 2

you have given me, *so that they may be one just as we are one*" (Jn 17:11).

- Trinity in essence is the model for the desired human community/unity
 - Self-donation/surrender creates "oneness"/ "wholeness"
 - Yet through self-donation, one creates identity
 - This is the antithesis of human thinking: we want to be in control; we do not want to be limited (or completely surrender self)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is 55:9-9)

- "It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity. A prayer of St. Theresa of Jesus wonderfully expresses this trust:
 - 'Let nothing trouble you / Let nothing frighten you
 - Everything passes / God never changes
 - Patience / Obtains all
 - Whoever has God / Wants for nothing
 - God alone is enough.'" (CCC ¶ 227)

Genesis: The Fall

Disordered Love

- The "Original" Sin
 - Adam places his will over God's will (desires not to be dependent on God; the autonomy of man)
 - Human-centric vs. God-centric life
 - The result: Suffering (Genesis 3:17-19)

¹⁷ "Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life.

¹⁸ Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return."

- Escalation of Sin
 - Murder of Abel; Cain to be avenged 7 fold (Gn 4:15)
 - Lamech to be avenged 70 fold (Gn 4:24)

Question: In the Gospels, how many times did Jesus say one should forgive his brother?

Answer: Depending on translation: seven times seventy, or 77 times.

➤ Noah and the Flood

Genesis 6: 5-6

⁵When the LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how no desire that his heart conceived was ever anything but evil,

⁶he regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was grieved.

➤ Nimrod and the Land of Shinar (Gn 10:8-10)

- Nimrod is the first potentate:

- Q: How do humans build unity?

- A: Domination

- Land of Shinar / Tower of Babel

- "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth." (Gn 11:4)

- Possibly disobeyed God's command: "Be fertile and multiply; *fill the earth* and subdue it." (Gn 1:28) -- (i.e., gathering in Shinar vs. filling the earth)

- God's punishment:

"Then the Lord said: 'If now, while they are one people, all speaking the same language, they have started to do this, nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do.

Let us then go down and there confuse their language, so that one will not understand what another says.'

Thus the Lord *scattered* them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city."

(Gn 11:6-8)

Question: At Pentecost, what happened?

Answer: Gift of Tongues: languages were symbolically reunited

Disordered love causes sin. Sin causes pain, suffering, and separation.

"For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1).

Jesus as Redeemer

Ordered Love

- Perfect obedience to the will of God (God-centric)

- “Though he was in the form of God, Jesus not did not regard equality with God, something to be grasped”
 - Rather, he emptied himself,
 - Taking the form of a slave
 - He humbled himself,
 - Becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross (a brutal, tortuous death principally for criminals)
- “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39)
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46)
- God teaches us through the *example* of his own Son what “likeness” means and the unity He desires for all humankind. (See ‘Parable of the Tenants,’ Mk 12:1-12).
- Arguably, only God could show humankind how to live as *creature*; Jesus will come again to judge how well we have done

St. Anselm’s Theory of Satisfaction (Cur Deus Homo?):

- Adam’s disobedience offended God, making him and his posterity outlaws
- Humans could not repair the injustice because of their inferior status, now worsened by continued sin
- Case of the Incarnation: because sinners are human, a human must make satisfaction; on the other hand, because God is offended, no one less than God can make adequate amends.
- Thus, justice is served and God’s love is manifest by sending his only son to earth to suffer and die as human on behalf of—“for”—sinners.
 - Jesus freely embraced his death; different than the rest of humanity
 - Death is a punishment for sin; Jesus was innocent of sin
 - Death for Jesus was a *supererogatory*: over and above what was required of him
- God’s demonstrates his solidarity with the human condition (grounded in the Incarnation) and His willingness to go above and beyond for the salvation of man and participation in His divine plan
 - Some argue the Incarnation was necessary, even without the Fall, as a continuation of Creation.

A Closer Look at Jesus and His Message

- Jewish view at the time of Jesus: Prosperity was a sign of virtuous living; misfortune and illness retribution for sinful living.
- Jesus was a carpenter (not a Sadducee, the wealthy and priestly class; or a Pharisee, known for knowledge of the Law).
- Jesus associated with the poor and marginalized “Bless are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3).
- Jesus encourages child-like trust: “Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Mk 10:15)
 - Translation: complete dependence on God the Father (a radical dependence)
- Jesus did not promise following him would mean a life without suffering: “Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:38).

- Jesus explained the Father’s willingness to forgive the “lost” (Parable of the Prodigal Son, Lk 15:11-32)
- Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, a role of servant: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15)
- Jesus talks about the ultimate expression of love: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13)

Question: What message is Jesus providing us?

Passion Narratives in the Gospels

- Single longest section in all four gospels
 - Believed to be the earliest part of the gospel written
- Anamnesis: “Do this as a remembrance of me”
 - Paschal Mystery we celebrate: Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection
 - Passage from the slavery of sin to new (eternal) life
 - Commemoration through the Eucharistic meal; sign of the new covenant
 - Fulfillment of the Scriptures (expiation for sin through the shedding of blood; the Epistle to the Hebrews explains the whole purpose of the Jewish sacrificial offerings was to foreshadow the sacrificial offering of Christ, who is both priest and oblation.)

New Testament Authors Agree on Several Truths

- Salvation is not possible apart from Jesus Christ
- By his suffering and death the innocent Jesus unilaterally made amends to God on behalf of others
- Obedience to the will of the Father and love for humanity led him freely to make reparations for sinners
- The objective value of Jesus’ work in no way exempts men and women from the need to repent, seek forgiveness, and enter into new relationship with God

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate”

- What is the significance of Pilate being mentioned by name in the Creed?
- Primary reason believed to be to establish the historical setting for the apex of our faith (26-36 CE)

Apostles Creed: “He descended to the Dead”

- Not in Nicea-Constantinople Creed
- What is the significance of this statement?
 - Explains Jesus was in fact truly dead; a *self-emptying* (Marthaler 171)
 - Docetism heresy taught Jesus only *appeared* to suffer and die; did not actually suffer and die
 - “In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him” (CCC ¶ 637)

- Interesting Depiction: The icon depicting the Resurrection in the Eastern Church (Catholic and Orthodox) is the Descent to the Dead (Descent to Hades)
 - Icon depicts Christ, often in a white garment, standing on two coffin lids, which are crossed. Christ is reaching out his hands to raise-up the just who had previously “fallen asleep.” Most icons depict Christ holding the hands of a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, the first to be raised.



- Easter troparion sung at various points throughout the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom from Easter to Ascension Thursday:

“Christ is risen from the dead.
By death He conquered death,
and to those in the graves,
He granted life.”
- By his death, Jesus conquered death
 - Specifically: “Jesus’ dying not only changed the world but transformed the significance of death itself” (Marthaler 176)
- Karl Rahner: “The descent into hell is Christ’s dying, insofar as he obediently accepts and realizes death which reduces man to impotence, and “in death” is exposed to (voluntary) total helplessness—wholly at God’s disposal; but by this means is redemptive obedience wins him power over the universe and history, because his relationship with the whole of creation does not cease in death but rather becomes manifest as existing ‘at the heart of the world’” (Quoted in Marthaler, 177).

Recapitulation

- God has a plan for humankind: he desires all to share in the divine life; *all are called*
- The union between God and humankind is through Christ Jesus;
 - He shows us the way by his own example
 - He gives us the sign of the new covenant, the Eucharist, to strengthen us to live the life to which we are called
- The work of the Church, founded by Christ, is to draw all to Christ by the preaching of the Gospel; Christ unites us to God
- Model of unity is the Trinity

Question: Why is there no suffering in the Trinity?

Answer: There is no need for suffering; there is no sin. Perfect unity through self-donation/surrender

On the Contemplation of God (William of St. Thierry, Abbott)

"Jesus taught us to love him by first loving us, even to death on the cross. By loving us and holding us so dear, he stirred us to love him who first loved us to the end. And this is clearly the reason: You [God] first loved us so that we might love you--not because you needed our love, *but because we could not be what you created us to be, except by loving you.*"