Welcome to Search 185. Today Henry and I will be discussing the topic of suffering. Attempting to answer life's deepest questions as to why we suffer.

The most important question of all is the question of the greatest good. What is the ultimate end? What is the purpose of human life?

Happiness is the end of life. Everyone always pursues, desires, and seeks everything else for happiness. Ultimate happiness is eternal life with God in heaven where we will be perfectly happy, content and with no suffering.

- We are creatures of both body and soul, with the soul being the greater of the two.

• If the soul is greater in value than the body, then the good of the soul is greater than the good of the body and the evil of the soul is greater than the evil of the body.

• The good of the body is health, pleasure, freedom from suffering. The good of the soul is wisdom and virtue. If we need to suffer to become wise, sacrifice some pleasure to be virtuous or if an easy life would make us less virtuous, then suffering would not contradict a good God.

Knowing that we are created by God for love and relationship and if God really loves me . . . Does it make sense that he lets me experience difficulties, disappointments, sorrow and suffering?

- Evil is a mystery not a problem. A problem is solvable, but a mystery is not.
    - o Mystery requires seeing, contemplating and insight. This is where the we must first go to better understand the mystery of suffering.
    - o Evil is mystery because we are in the midst of it. That is why we can't solve it. We are the cause of evil through our fallenness and failure to live according to how we were made.
- The answer is that it may not make sense to us, but God works in us knowing that this world is not our ultimate home. Since we're created for heaven, we feel that our life should be "heavenly." When it is not, then we experience the result of "the fall" when sin entered our world.
- This sorrow makes it seem like God has failed in his promises of the love and life for which we were created.

Why is life sometimes seem so unfair?

- Story of Joseph in Egypt. (Gen 37)
- Personal story of suffering that has a purpose.
- Our hearts yearn for answers to the question of suffering, because we sense it in depths of our being that we are created

for perfection . . . and we are. That is why some things can only be fulfilled when we get to heaven.

- In order for us to focus on our true home, we cannot be so attached to this world. This is why the Lord allows us to feel discontent and dissatisfied in this life. The longing in our hearts will never be fulfilled on this side of eternity.
- We are not completely happy in this life, because we were not supposed to be! The joys we do experience in life are meant to entice us into desiring to be with the Lord in heaven for all eternity. In heaven, ALL our longings and desires will be fulfilled beyond human comprehension.
- Our tendency towards sin will keep this world from being the heaven we desire.

How do we get to a better grasp of how to embrace our suffering?

It is a journey, a life-long journey. Our goal in this life is to make it to heaven and to bring as many people with us!

Step 1 Know that God loves you unconditionally and desires only the good for you

- Jn 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . . .
- Is 43:4 Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you

He is a Good Father and wants what is best for us, even if we don't understand HOW that is accomplished by God.

Step 2 We must surrender ourselves to God's Divine Will

We abandon ourselves God's Divine Will. Whatever He wants, I want.

- Garden of Gethsemane: Mt 26:39 My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."
- St. Paul: 2 Cor 12:7-10 a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

  But many times, it is difficult to accept the suffering. It is unbearable. What can we do about that?

Step 3 We must ask for God's Grace to carry this cross of suffering

> **Mark 10:27** *Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."*

• This is where prayer, silence and asceticism come into play . . .

• You have to take time to be still and be with God.

But often we feel that God does not hear or answer my prayers . . .

Step 4 Understand that Sin is a barrier to Grace

• Ps 34: 13-18 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry. The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

• We must root out sin in our lives . . .

What can I do to root our sin in my life?

Step 5

- First is to have the desire to root out sin in our life? Am I living with my boyfriend/girlfriend outside of marriage? I am watching porn or indulging in other sexual sins? Do I cheat, lie or steal? Do I gossip or am I envious of what others have?
- Second is to confess your sins and ask for forgiveness.
- Thirdly, is to live a life of Grace, receiving the graces God affords you in your situation. As a Catholic, we must frequent the Sacraments of Confession and Communion and attend Mass every Sunday.
- Fourthly, find a group of like-minded persons in which to associate. Build a brotherhood with others at your church. Find strength in numbers.

What happens after I root out sin in my life?

Step 6 We begin to be Holy

- You then begin to develop the character that God desires – Holiness.
    - 1 Pet 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”
- You grow . . . Growth is often painful and scary. We must “die to self.”
    - Lk 9:23 If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

- Develop the virtues. Virtue is defined as a good habit – Habits take time to develop. Be patient (it is a virtue!)
    - Gal 5:22-24 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
- You begin to surrender to God through obedience and trust
- Genuine surrender acknowledges my pain and problems may be needed to fulfill God's purpose and glory. We accept these with trust like St. Paul and Joseph (son of Jacob)
    - 2 Cor 12:7–10 And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh . . . Three times I begged the Lord that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, for the sake of Christ, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.
    - Gen 50:19-20 But Joseph said to them, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive"

Step 7 Pray, Fast and Meditate on Scripture

- Develop a habit of daily prayer. Prayer is our conversation with God.

- Pray in the morning and evening for sure. Add prayers throughout the day for all occasions – work, family, before meals, etc.
- Don't just ask for things, praise God and "in all circumstances, give thanks." (1 Thes 5:18)

• Read good books like, Abandonment to Divine Providence by Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Heliotropium: Conformity of the Human Will to the Divine by Fr. Jeremias Drexel

• Fasting helps to gain control of the passions through self- denial

• Read the Word of God

- The scriptures are a primary way in which God speaks to us. If you want to hear what God has to say about your life, family and relationships, etc., read the Bible every day.

Is there any way to know WHY I am suffering in particular?

Why Do We Suffer?

The following are CLUES as to why we may be suffering:

As consequences of our own actions Many of our sufferings are self-induced. We gossip and fight with one another. We have bad eating habits and take smoking and alcohol to excess. We allow our desires to control us and this can lead to addictions.

> **Rom 13:12–14** *Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in*

quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

For Spiritual Growth and Maturity

The Lord knows we need an increasing in humility, faith and other virtues. We grow when we do God's will. The journey through this growth process that brings joy in this world. The removal of pride, which prevents the growth in all of the virtues, creates humility, spiritual strengthening and preparation for the difficulties in our life.

> **Rom 5:3–5**. . . *we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing 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.*

To repair what is broken

Our sins cause a rupture in what is true, good and beautiful. To repair the damage our sin has caused, sometimes God has to cause us to suffer to fix it. Example: Someone jumps from a tree and breaks their arm, but refuses treatment. Later, the arm is deformed because of the break and person has a doctor repair it. The doctor must first re-break the arm, thereby causing suffering, to carry out the repair.

For Discipline

When a child needs correction or guidance, it may be necessary to carryout punishment when the need arises, especially if the offense is serious or life threatening. God is the same with us – when sin becomes life threatening to our soul, God can intervene to keep us from falling into sin so that we may be saved.

> **Heb 12:7–11** *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly*

fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

As a result of persecution or at the hands of others

Many suffer because of the free will act of others that inflict pain and suffering to others.

> **Mt 5:11–12** *“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

As a redemptive act

We are called by Christ to participate in HIS saving work. We are to bring others to salvation through our love and the Gospel message – we are co- workers with Christ

> **Col 1:24** *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church*

> **1 Co 9:19**, *22-23 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

Answer to prayer; God’s justice

God’s act of justice by the prayers of someone we have hurt because of our sin.

> **Rev 6:9–10** *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?”*

> **Rom 3:5–6** *But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*

To give meaning to life

Things/actions/accomplishments don’t have much meaning if we did not have to work and struggle to gain them. These difficulties produce the joy of having Christ in your life instead of material possessions.

> **Phil 3:7–8** *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.*

> **Gal 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

To keep us from sinning

When suffering enters our life, we begin to understand that a continual acceptance of suffering is incompatible with a proneness to sin. It is difficult to be sinning in the flesh (licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry) if other difficulties occupy your time and thoughts. Sin is the enemy that will prevent us from gaining eternal life with God.

> **1 Pet 4:1–2** *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the*

rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God.

To redirect our lives to the right path during our life and eventually to salvation

God desires our good. If our direction in life is leading us to eternal damnation, God may redirect our lives through suffering, if necessary, so that we may find the path he desires for us in this life. His ultimate goal setting our path to heaven. Paul's conversion is a great example.

> **Acts 9:3-22** *Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground . . . Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. And the Lord said to [Ananias] . . . "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine . . . for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized . . . But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.*

Obtains for us a higher place in Heaven

When we choose to accept whatever suffering comes our way, through the power of Jesus' grace working in us, we show how we can love authentically by continuing to love amidst the pain and suffering. Our reward is the ability to love greater and more profoundly. This is how we gain a higher level in heaven . . . to whatever measure our hearts are enlarged to love, the greater reward He gives us for loving as He loves, even unto death.

> **Rom 2:6–8** *For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for*

those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.

That we may be glorified in heaven / to save us

We are called to imitate Christ. This means that our journey to the Father is the same as Christ's – through suffering and ultimately the cross. We will suffer, but we will gain the same reward that Jesus first gained for us – union with the Father.

> **Rom 8:16–17** *it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

> **2 Cor 7:9–11** *I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!*

Affirmation that we were made for more

We know in the very depths of our being that we were not made for suffering. Especially the ultimate suffering – Death. We "feel it in our bones" that this is not our home and that we were not made for death. If his earth were our home, we would feel at home, but we don't. We "feel" like we were made for more . . . perfection and eternal life . . . and so we are.

> **Jn 15:18–19** *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

To show our dependence on God for everything

If we never had to suffer, we would rarely call out to God. Suffering at times, is God's way of reminding us that we are not meant for this world and that we have to trust him. We need to understand that we are not invincible or powerful, but that we can do nothing apart from Christ.

> **Phil 4:13** *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*

> **Heb 4:15–16** *For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

As punishment for sin

Disobedience to God's commands bring about punishment because sin has consequences.

> **2 Thes 1:6–9** *since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*

To give glory and honor to God

Through our sufferings, we witness to Christ, his mercy and his saving grace. In this manner we help others to know Christ. Even though we have not seen Jesus, we love him nonetheless. It is this faith in the midst of suffering that brings joy to our lives and gives the Lord glory and honor.

> **1 Pet 1:6–7** *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that*

the genuineness of your faith, is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

> **1 Pet 4:16** *yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God.*

To please God through our endurance of righteous suffering

God is pleased and we receive his approval if we endure suffering for righteousness sake.

> **1 Pe 2:18–21** *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

To learn obedience

If Christ learned obedience through suffering, who are we to despise and reject suffering if the Lord wills it to make us more like Christ.

> **Heb 5:8-9** *Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*

To live as Christ lived, to imitate Christ in his suffering

> **2 Tim 3:10–13** *Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.*