

***Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time***  
***October 29, 2023***  
***Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant***

*“He joyously shouts, ‘It is finished!’ [John 19:30]. Yes, those seem to be sorrowful words, but they were words of joy to that soul aflame and consumed in the fire of divine charity, the soul of the incarnate Word, God’s Son. It is as if the gentle Jesus wanted to say, ‘I have completely fulfilled what was written of me. Fulfilled too is my painful desire to redeem the human race. I am happy, exultant, that I have finished this suffering.’” (taken from The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena, vol. 1)*

In the opening chapter of his first letter to the Christian community of Thessalonica, Saint Paul acknowledges how the Good News of Jesus was received with joy even in the midst of affliction. Those familiar with the teachings of Saint Paul would recognize this joy. Saint Paul understood this joy associated with living the Good News, especially to live a heroic Christian existence during times of affliction and suffering, as a sure and certain sign of God’s presence found within the Christian. To experience joy in times of suffering allowed the Christian to become an imitator of, not only the apostles, but more importantly, of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In our reflection, let us explore what this teaching means for you and I.

Venerable Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once declared on his television program: *“Our capacity for pain is greater than our capacity for pleasure.”* At first, this statement may cause us bewilderment. Yet, if we think of a parent who continues to love their child even though the actions of the child have caused them pain and grief. Despite how great the suffering they endure, they bear it for love of their child. Contrast that with pleasure which arises quickly and fades almost as quickly. I have the pleasure of a tasty dessert, but that pleasure ceases when the dessert is consumed. Furthermore, pleasure, when taken to extremes, can be transformed into suffering. We could, given an appropriate length of time, discuss the causes of sufferings and attempt to answer the fundamental question: “Why does man suffer?” Yet, I find these would sidetrack us from Saint Paul’s understanding of finding joy in the midst of suffering.

Allow me to attempt to explain this teaching in one sentence — The joy found in suffering is known and experienced only when the suffering is seen as a sacrifice, specifically, a sacrifice offered in union with the Sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.

Suffering opens us up to two options – hell or heaven. I am in hell when I center my suffering upon myself. I become consumed in how I am affected by the suffering. It controls me and dictates the way I live with and act toward others. I am in heaven when I allow my suffering to transform me. I no longer focus on myself. The questions of how or why need not matter. I desire to join my sufferings to the suffering of Jesus. I live with my suffering knowing that these moments are special. Depending upon the severity of my suffering, I may not have these opportunities, dealing with others, to pass my way again. Therefore, I treat each person and event as a unique opportunity to witness the joy I have in living in union with Jesus. Saint Catherine of Siena once wrote, of Our Lord Jesus, being filled with immense joy as He completed the sufferings of His Passion. His Sacred Heart, so moved with love for you and I, cannot be contained. It must be expressed with His words: “It is finished.” The suffering is

finished. Not solely the suffering of His Passion, rather and more importantly, the suffering of all of His children who have been separated from Him since the fall of Adam. That supreme suffering is now finished and He bows His Sacred Head and dies. Jesus offered everything in suffering for love of you and I. This is the reason we should rejoice when we can offer our suffering as a means to express our love for both God and each other. One cannot truly love unless one is willing to suffer.