

***Thirtieth Week of Ordinary Time
October 27, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #44***

*“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ 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** (emphasis added) we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:15-18)*

In his 1984 Apostolic Letter, On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote: *“Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished.”* (p. 30). This line of Pope Saint John Paul II is neither random or a later addition to our Christian theological heritage. It was Saint Paul who first posed this idea of “Redemptive Suffering” when he penned the line: *“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.”* (Colossians 1:24). Before we press forward, we must understand what, we believe, Saint Paul meant concerning “what is lacking.”

Did Saint Paul want Christians to believe the Redemption of mankind through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus was deficient/lacking in some way? The great theologians of our Christian Faith would declare the sufferings of Jesus were entirely sufficient to save all of mankind. There is nothing more that needs to be done in this work of Jesus. However, we also believe God, in His Love for us, allows us to offer our own personal sufferings toward mankind’s Redemption. This could be understood as a Paradox of our Christian Faith. The work of our Redemption is, at the same time, complete and on-going.

The beauty of Saint Paul’s statement is found in his deliberate connection of Christ’s body to His church. It is only speculation on my part, but when we recall his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, we may glimpse the foundational moment of his belief. *“And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. . .’”* (Acts 9:4-5). Sacred Scripture teaches Jesus has already ascended to the right hand of the Father in Heaven before this incident occurs. Therefore, the Fathers of the Church concluded Jesus, in His question, associates the Christians being persecuted with Himself. Put another way, Christ as Head cannot be separated from His Body which is His Church in all of her members. Likewise, the suffering endured by Christ the Head affects all of the members of His Body, the Church.

The beloved Angelic Doctor of our Faith, Saint Thomas Aquinas, would remind all Christians of our participation in Redemption of mankind. We may assist, through our sufferings, with Christ’s work of Redemption. We need only offer our sufferings to the Father in union with the sufferings of His Son. My family, this choice to offer our sufferings to the Father in union with Jesus is one of the most important decisions we will make. Often, it appears, we

are called to make this choice numerous times throughout a given day. It is not a one-time decision because we do not experience suffering only one time. These decisions require a mature spiritual/prayerful attitude on our part. A Christian must accept any and all suffering they are subjected to in a "Christ-like" manner. As He walked to His Death upon the Cross, He did so without a murmur, complaint or harsh word spoken. It is necessary we do the same if we want to follow where He has led. And in doing so, we are able to, in our own feeble way, assist Him in much the same manner as either Simon of Cyrene, Veronica or any of the Holy Women who stood by His Cross on that most blessed day. As we conclude, we are faced with a question which must be addressed in our own personal prayer lives: "Am I willing to suffer as He suffered, the way in which He suffered for the sake of those whom I know and those I will never know?" If we are to be like Him, our only answer must be a humble and reflective "Yes."