

The Why of Suffering

It is interesting that when we suffer the first word that would come out of our mouth is: why?

Suffering is a privation of the good, the loss of something that was supposed to be there: the loss of a friend, a family member, the loss of health, the loss of material things. Yet amid the loss of these things it reveals our natural inclination toward the good. "I want this good, I want to be with this person" so when I lose this or that I begin to look for meaning, I begin to ask: why?

'Why' is a search for meaning amidst our suffering. This search is so great that it can be the difference between life and death. Viktor Frankl was a psychologist who was captured and put into the concentration camps during WWII and he experienced and saw incredible suffering. Yet with his developed skills of observation as a psychologist, he noticed a peculiar trait.

Those who had lost hope, who had given up on life, who did not show up for work, who did not get out of bed or were dejected in spirit tended to be the ones who died first. In other words, those who had lost a sense of meaning to life gave up on life and tended to be the ones who did not survive.

However, those who had found meaning, who looked forward to a brighter day, these were the ones who tended to survive and make it through the prison camps. E.g. Viktor and work and Conrad Baars.

Indeed, the search for meaning in one's suffering is truly the difference between life and death. After he was liberated from the camp, Viktor Frankl developed what he called: logotherapy. Logos meaning reason and so therefore he was engaging in reason-therapy, meaning-therapy, helping people arrive at a sense of meaning in their sufferings.

There was one man who had lost his leg in the war and he was so torn up about, so distressed. When he came to Viktor, Viktor told him, "maybe you lost your leg so that your wife did not have to lose hers." The one legged man was so impressed by this one comment, he picked up his bags and thanked the doctor for having relieved him of his heavy burden which he carried for years.

Ah! What this man found in his suffering was meaning, but not just any meaning, but particularly love. He saw how his suffering was a form of love for his wife, how he was bearing the burden not meaninglessly, but he bore it for her, for love.

Love is the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. (JP II)

Suffering comes for us all. There is no doubt. The question for us is: will we find meaning in it? Not just meaning we create for ourselves but true redemptive meaning, suffering that is imbued with divine love giving light the darkness of meaningless and obscurity. That is what Jesus does for us in his Passion. Today he prophesizes his suffering and death.

The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; ¹⁹ then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."

Yet this suffering is not the end all and be all. *The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Ah! There it is. Love. Love infused into suffering. Love which dispels the darkness and gives meaning to all suffering. Yet this is no ordinary love. This is a divine love radiating our sufferings with the glory of God to transform it into the means by which we are purified and made fit to enter into the joy of heaven.

Therefore, today and any other day when you encounter suffering, infuse it with the ray of divine love because in the face of the despair of suffering, indeed, love is the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering.