

THROUGH Suffering and Desire

It might not be uncommon for many of us to hear that “all religions are the same”, “they all lead to the same path”. But is that really true? If we studied other world religions, would their core beliefs coincide or clash with the teachings of our Lord and Savior who entrusted the fullness of the truth to the Catholic Church?

I want to look at the teachings of the Buddha on suffering and compare and contrast that with our Gospel today because if we actually look at the teachings of the different religions we will find that Christianity’s approach to suffering is completely different from Buddhism.

Siddhartha Gautama, who would later be known as the Buddha (the enlightened one), was raised in a palace shielded from the outside world. Curiosity eventually got the better of him and he ventured far outside the walls of his comfortable kingdom and was shocked to encounter all the suffering in the real world.

Eventually he renounced his former life to seek enlightenment, and he vowed not to rise from his meditations until he became enlightened because he was seeking the answer to a great mystery: why is humanity unhappy? One day as he was sitting under the sacred bodhi tree, a great inspiration came to him from which he exclaimed that he was buddha, i.e. enlightened. From his enlightenment, Siddhartha or ‘Buddha’ would give his first sermon which he would call the four noble truths:

- 1) All of life is dukkha (suffering, out-of-jointedness), broken consciousness not broken relationship with God
- 2) The cause of all suffering is selfish desire: desire creates the gap between what we want and what we have
- 3) Suffering can be extinguished by extinguishing desire: get rid of the cause of the effect, suffering is an illusion and achieving nirvana (blow out, extinguishes) this difference.
- 4) The way to extinguish desire is by following the Noble Eightfold Path (right thought, associations etc)

Already we can see from our Catholic perspective that there are some profound differences with Buddhism.

- 1) Buddha found liberation FROM suffering sitting UNDER a TREE while Jesus saved us THROUGH suffering by being nailed TO a TREE.
 - a. *“The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death...they will mock him, and spit upon*

him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again” (Mk 10:33-34)

- 2) SUFFERING is the GREAT EVIL in Buddhism whereas in Christianity ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD, the SECOND DEATH is the GREATEST EVIL.
- 3) The CAUSE of suffering is DESIRE in BUDDHISM whereas in CHRISTIANITY the CAUSE of suffering is ORIGINAL SIN.
- 4) Followers of Buddhism EXTINGUISH DESIRE and SUFFERING by following the Noble Eightfold Path while Christians embrace the Eight Beatitudes to experience the REDEMPTION of DESIRE through SUFFERING.

Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God... Blessed are you when people 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.

To say that all religions are the same would water down and distort the Truth of Christianity. Christianity has substantial answers to the problem of suffering because Buddhism advocates the extinguishing of desire but is that answer helpful when someone loses a loved one or a mother experiences a miscarriage? That to OVERCOME that suffering we MUST extinguish our love for our dear ones?

Jesus Christ came to reveal that it is NOT through the DIMINISHING, the EXTINGUISHING of LOVE that suffering is overcome but rather the FULL REVELATION of the power of DIVINE LOVE **IN** suffering:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

It is through the desire of God that the deeper cause of suffering, sin and death, is eliminated and HIS desire redeems OUR desire so that we can enjoy eternal life. In fact, by uniting our desire with Jesus who drinks the CUP of SUFFERING and is his BAPTISED/IMMERSED into death that we are called to follow:

The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.

As we engage with our modern world let us remember the power of Christianity and its profound answer to suffering centered on our Savior who EMBRACED suffering to redeem us.