

## ANTI-FRAGILITY

When his dad saw him, he nearly fainted and his mom took four months to get over it. In 1982, Nick was born in Melbourne, Australia but what was shocking to his parents was that he was born without any arms or legs. There was no medical explanation for it, and the doctors believed he would grow up as a vegetable.

As Nick was growing up, not only did he have to navigate life without limbs, he was constantly bullied by other kids at school. Not only was this difficult, Nick found that he had no meaning in life, no purpose, he wasn't sure if he was ever going to be independent or get married. Life was so miserable for him, his suffering was about to BREAK him, so at one point he thought about ending it all at the age of 10...

We all encounter suffering. Some of us to varying degrees and if we are not suffering we can be sure that our loved ones are suffering. But how do we respond to suffering, what is the Christian way to respond to suffering in a way that can give us life instead of death?

Nassim Taleb, a philosopher and economist, noted some interesting observations about how certain things response to disorder and stress. He noted that there are three ways to deal with disorder or stress. FRAGILITY, IMMOBILITY, and ANTI-FRAGILITY.

- 1) When something encounters stress, it breaks. For example, if you had a glass plate and it encountered stress e.g. somebody kicked it, then it would break. The plate has the properties of FRAGILITY.
- 2) When something encounters stress, it does not break but it remains the same. For example, if I kicked a giant stone, it would not break but remain the same. We would call the giant stone, ROBUST→IMMOBILITY

And when we look towards our Gospel today, we find that we can apply these categories to the people in our Gospel today **in response to suffering**. They can experience FRAGILITY or IMMOBILITY.

When Peter follows Jesus after he is arrested, and people confront him, how does he respond? When people question Peter if he is associated with Jesus, Peter flat out denies Jesus: “Woman I do not know him...I do not know what you are talking about!” And after the cock crows, he realizes what he has done and he went out and wept bitterly.

How did Peter respond to suffering? WITH FRAGILITY. The threat of suffering broke him.

Notice how the one of the thieves responded to Jesus’ suffering. He himself has just been crucified, he has experienced the excruciating pain of the Cross, he is experiencing deep suffering, but how does his heart respond? Unlike the good thief, the other thief does not repent, his heart does not change and he is ridiculing Jesus. His heart has become bitter. He responds WITH IMMOBILITY.

Yet Jesus reveals to us that there is a third way. A third way to respond to suffering that does not break us, that does not make us indifferent. Nassim Taleb talks about how an object can encounter stress, and when it does, it does not break, it does not remain the same, but rather it gets stronger. E.g. diamond is formed through much much pressure. The diamond is considered ANTI-FRAGILE.

When Jesus enters into our suffering, he took what was meaningless and destructive and united them with his Cross to transform suffering and death into the means by which the whole world was saved. In other words, he took the poison and turned it into the antidote.

In the flogging where Jesus’ skin was torn to shreds, the crown of thorns piercing his scalp, the nails driven through his hands and feet, Jesus did not respond to his suffering with FRAGILITY and IMMOBILITY, but rather it made him stronger, it made him ANTI-FRAGILE, it made him victorious! Jesus was obedient unto death on the Cross yet God highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name above all names!

Suffering is an evil no doubt about it, yet suffering does not have the final word. In fact, as Christians we see suffering as a gift. When we suffer we don’t break or become bitter, we become stronger because we become united more closely with Jesus on the Cross who uses our suffering to bring about not only our salvation but the salvation of the whole world.

This is the hope we have as Christians. And through grace, the power of ANTI-FRAGILITY is open to us as well!

Fortunately for Nick Vujicic, he saw the grief that he would have caused for his parents by ending it all in the bathtub. His life was still difficult, and he was angry at God for his pain and he blamed God. "If you are a God of Love, why did you make me this way?" However, the turning point came at the age of 15 when he was reading the story of the blind man in John 9. He read that the blind man was born that way not because of the sin of his parents but so that the works of God would be revealed through him.

"I realized that God wasn't the one that gave me this pain. But what was intended for bad, God turned into good." His suffering almost broke him, it left him bitter but now he saw it as a way to glorify God.

Nick surrendered his life to Jesus because he knew Jesus had a plan for him.

While he was at school speaking with his janitor, that conversation would change his life forever. The janitor said, "Nick, you're going to be a speaker." At the age of 17, he began speaking in front of six students and now after speaking 2600 times, meeting 12 presidents and speaking at 7 congresses, Nick is sharing his story of transformation and hope and how Jesus has transformed his life. Nick has shown how he has used his suffering to make him stronger by glorifying God through his life.

How will you respond to your suffering?

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday and we wave these palms because it is an ancient sign of victory, a sign that Jesus has come and is victorious over suffering and death. Yet we too share in this victory, when we unite our sufferings with his, when we offer our suffering bodies just like the bread is offered at mass, so that we too can say with Jesus, "This is my body given up for you." Then we will find that we respond to suffering not with FRAGILITY, nor with IMMOBILITY, but with ANTI-FRAGILITY transforming us to make us stronger like precious diamonds.