

“No pain, no gain.” While I was at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary down in Philadelphia preparing to become a priest, I felt called to write these words on a blank sheet of paper and hang them on the wall in my dorm room for the 6 years that I was there. I think I did this because I knew that, inevitably, there would be challenges and suffering while in the seminary and the Lord wanted to remind me that He would seek to strengthen and sanctify me through any and all suffering that I would experience—and that under *His* providential love and grace, any pain would lead to a sanctifying gain. “No pain, no gain.”

One could summarize the powerful message of the second reading today from the Letter to the Hebrews with this same proverbial phrase: “No pain, no gain.” In fact, today’s second reading constitutes a beautiful and mysterious message from our Lord that we need to hear in times of suffering and adversity. Today’s passage from Hebrews is perfect for personal prayer, contemplation, and reflection.

Brothers and sisters, in light of the Lord’s words to us in the second reading, we may come to acknowledge that in our highly

polarized and divided culture, one truth that unites all of us as human beings, regardless of who we are, how much money we make, where we come from, etc. *is that we all suffer*. In this temporary, earthly life, *all of us* experience suffering to a certain degree.

Tragically, we can't escape suffering and we can't entirely avoid it. And yet we're living in a self-obsessed culture that goes to extreme and disturbing lengths to avoid any and all suffering, even to the point of deliberately killing innocent human beings. There are many in our culture who irrationally believe that if we just kill the human beings who suffer, then we will eliminate suffering. Such an ideological agenda is so morally insane and contradictory—not to mention dehumanizing.

When it comes to helping those who suffer, we always should seek to eliminate the *suffering, not the person who suffers!* Those who suffer deserve our love and support—they deserve compassion, mercy, and adequate life-giving care, not a dismissive attitude that treats human beings like disposable objects.

Brothers and sisters, I've said it before and I'll say it again, if we think we can go through this earthly life without suffering, *we're*

deluding ourselves. You don't have to be Catholic or even religious to acknowledge the objective, existential reality that all human beings on this earth suffer—you just have to be realistic. Unfortunately, suffering is a part of our fallen human condition, caused by the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, our first parents, when they rejected God out of selfish pride. And so while in this temporary, earthly life, we simply cannot escape suffering, no matter how hard we try.

So rather than delude ourselves into thinking that we “will never experience any suffering, hardships, or challenges in this temporary, passing life,” let us humbly heed the words of the second reading today and with the grace of God, *embrace our suffering as Christ embraced His suffering*. And as we embrace our suffering, let us see our suffering as *powerful opportunities for growth in faith, hope, and love*—let us see our suffering as an opportunity to grow in compassion, mercy, patience, self-control, and holiness. This is the grace-filled discipline of suffering.

Now just to clarify: we are not masochists. Catholics get accused all the time for being these crazy masochists who love pain and

suffering. We don't love pain and suffering. God did not create us for pain and suffering. So while we shouldn't love *pain and suffering*, we should love *what God can do with our pain and suffering!* We should *love* what God wants to do for us and others through our pain and suffering! God is so powerful and so loving that he can take the most painful, horrible suffering, and transform it into the most beautiful, sanctifying grace. One of the most basic truths of our faith is that God allows us to suffer so that He can bring forth an even greater good. Of course we *don't seek suffering*, but when it inevitably comes, the Lord teaches us how to embrace it, overcome it, and carry our cross.

The truth is that the devil seeks to destroy us through our suffering—God seeks to sanctify us through our suffering. This is the Fatherly discipline that we hear about in the second reading today from Hebrews. *God wants to make us saints through our suffering. God doesn't like suffering in and of itself. He didn't create it, but through our Lord Jesus Christ, He certainly transformed and redeemed it—* turning the weapon of the enemy against him and making it a powerful weapon against evil. *In Christ our Savior*, Who suffered and died on

the cross to save us from sin and death, suffering has been transformed into a means of sanctification and salvation and the devil absolutely hates this!

Brothers and sisters, perspective is everything. And the perspective we need as Catholics and disciples of the crucified and risen Christ is the theological virtue of faith, which enables us to see as God sees—to see all things in our life as God sees them, and this includes our suffering. Faith enables us to see our suffering, *not as a threat*, but as a powerful ally that can help us to grow in love, selflessness, humility, compassion, and mercy. Faith in Christ enables us to see suffering as a powerful means of growing in virtue and holiness.

Brothers and sisters, it's important for us to understand that *not all discipline is punishment!* For example, when athletes get up at 4 or 5 in the morning to work out, they're not punishing themselves, they're exercising discipline to help them grow and succeed! So if suffering is a discipline as the Lord tells us in the second reading today, and discipline strengthens us, *then with the necessary help of God's grace, we should*

embrace our suffering as a means of growing stronger as a disciple and becoming the best version of ourselves!

If we consider ourselves ***disciples*** of Christ, then we should accept ***discipline***. If you notice, the word “disciple” and “discipline” have the same root word. The English word “discipline” is derived from the Latin noun *disciplina*, which means “instruction and training.” It’s derived from the Latin root word *discere*, which means “to learn.” Brothers and sisters, if we cooperate with God’s grace in the midst of suffering and humbly surrender to the loving will of our Heavenly Father in all things, then suffering can be a powerful teacher.

Obviously none of this is easy. But with God’s grace, all things are possible! As St. Paul eloquently wrote in his Letter to the Philippians, “I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.” Brothers and sisters, ***in Christ we are strong! In Christ we are powerful! In Christ, we can conquer all things and overcome any and all trials and suffering.*** So as we prepare to worship and receive our crucified and risen Savior, ***truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist***, let us thank Him for His unconditional love for us. And may we always

recognize as *His disciples*, that *through Him, with Him, and in Him*,

we are victorious over any evil and suffering that this passing world may

throw at us.