



# *Student Worksheet*

## **Lesson 11: THE MEANING OF SUFFERING**

### *Opening Prayer*

#### **LEADER**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Lord Jesus, you know the pains of the human heart, the aches of the human body, and even the agony of death. Still, we often feel alone in our suffering. We question the purpose of pain and find our faith challenged in tough times. Teach us to look to your wounds, to bind our sufferings to yours, and to turn to you in tough times. May we see in our sufferings a sliver of your cross with which we can suffer and redeem alongside you. Amen.*

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### *Fr. Mike's Thought Train*

#### **THE BIG QUESTION**

Why do we suffer?

#### **THE SHORT ANSWER**

God permits suffering so that we can become co-workers with Christ in the redemption of the world.

#### **THE BREAKDOWN**

- **Jesus did not come to take away suffering but to transform it.** Jesus tells us directly, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33, NAB).
- **He gives our suffering meaning. Jesus makes suffering redemptive.**
  - \* *Jesus on the cross seems like foolishness and weakness, but the cross is actually the power of God and the wisdom of God. The cross is how God redeemed the world.*
  - \* *There is no depth of pain where Jesus hasn't gone, and he did this to redeem it.*
  - \* *He invites you into the redemptive part of suffering.*
- **He gives us a sliver of his cross so we can participate in his redemption.**
  - \* *St. Paul says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24).*
  - \* *St. John Paul II explains that there is nothing lacking in Jesus' work of redemption, but Jesus extends to us a sliver of his cross so that we can become co-workers.*
- **This teaching is the secret of every single saint!**
- **Jesus can make us strong in weakness because he transforms the suffering.** Suffering without Jesus just hurts. Suffering with Jesus can change the world.
- **Bring your suffering to Jesus on the cross, and say, "Lord, I offer it for you and with you. Let this weakness now have power. Let this thing that doesn't make sense have meaning. Let that meaning be that I join my suffering to yours in the work of redemption."**

## *Talk It Out*

1. How did Jesus change the experience of suffering?
2. What are some of the human experiences that Christ entered into?
3. Is anything lacking in the suffering of Christ? What is St. Paul saying in Colossians 1:24?
4. Is Fr. Mike's message in this lesson different from what you previously thought about suffering? Have you ever gotten the impression that being a Christian means having a pain-free life?
5. Share a personal struggle you experienced recently that could be an opportunity to join your suffering to the cross as an offering of love alongside Christ.
6. Have you witnessed someone who lives out this understanding of suffering as redemptive and dignifying?

## *Hands On*

### **SPIRITUAL BOUQUET**

A Spiritual Bouquet is an offering of prayer, action, joys, or sufferings for the benefit of others. Offering a Spiritual Bouquet is a good way to bring the content of this lesson to life.

As a group, identify someone in the community who needs prayer and support. It might be someone with cancer, someone who is grieving a loss, or the residents at a local nursing home. Fill an attractive notebook or binder with notes from those in your group. The notes should follow the template below. Remember that it is important to follow through on the offering after you deliver the note.

*Template:*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ ,

- **A sentence of sympathy about the suffering this person experiences**
- **A promise to offer ...**
  - a prayer (for example, the Rosary, adoration time, an intention at Mass, or a chaplet)
  - or, a particular action (for instance, a personal difficulty you are going through)
  - or, a sacrifice (for instance, fasting for a day, giving up movies for a week, or driving in silence for a week)
- **... for you and your intentions. Please know that we are praying for you.**
- **An encouragement related to the meaning of suffering (such as a Scripture verse or a quote)**
- **A personalized signature**

## *Food for Thought*

1. Write about a persistent suffering in your life. How can you join this suffering to the cross of Christ?
2. Write about someone who models St. Paul's words, "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).
3. Write a message of encouragement, addressed to yourself, that you can read when you are hurting the most.

## *Closing Prayer*

### **READER (COLOSSIANS 1:24)**

*"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."*

### **LEADER**

*Rejoicing in suffering seems crazy, and even this single verse from St. Paul is hard to understand. Today we have considered the way Jesus gave meaning to suffering. He did not take suffering away. Instead, he infused pain with purpose and replaced defeat with lasting victory. We pray that we will have the grace today like St. Paul to live with that purpose and share in that victory. We take a moment to consider ways that we might be suffering today. We ask for grace to bring our sufferings to Christ on the cross and to offer and unite our sufferings with his.*

*[Pause for a moment.]*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*