

FROM THE SEMINARIAN

Why is there suffering?

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

For centuries, those who have challenged the existence of God often raise the question “If God is all good and all powerful, then how can there be suffering in the world?” It is a very reasonable question that all of us may ask at one point or another. In times of adversity, we may think, “why can’t God just make it better?” or “why can’t God just fix this if it is so easy for Him?” Saint Paul sheds some light on the Catholic understanding of suffering in this weekend’s second reading. He says that we do not only boast in the glory of God, but we also boast “of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:1-5). It is not that God allows suffering because He doesn’t care, but it’s because He knows it’s good for us. Suffering gives us the opportunity to face greater adversities that may come our way. We ought not to flee from suffering, but to endure it, knowing that it is for our own good and will bring us closer to the living God. Jesus shows us that enduring suffering is *necessary* in order to achieve heavenly Beatitude by suffering and dying on the cross. He *willingly endured* the greatest of pain and the greatest of suffering for our sake, even though He could have fled in an instant. Jesus suffered and died not for His own sake, but our sake out of love. He chose to lay down His life for us and He wouldn’t hesitate to do it again. The symbol of the Christian people is the cross because it is our sign of victory! By suffering and dying on the cross, our Lord conquered sin and death and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus gives suffering a new name: opportunity. It is an opportunity for grace, for holiness, for heroism, and encompassing all those things is love. We are able to unite our suffering to the sufferings of the cross and follow Jesus into eternal life in the way He showed us how: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). If it weren’t for suffering, we wouldn’t have great saints like Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and even Saint Patrick. In Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoice because they had the opportunity to suffer for Christ! We may not be in the “rejoicing mood” when we suffer, whether it be from loss, persecutions, pains, etc., but we should make sure we thank God often for the opportunities for holiness and love. Let us follow the way of the cross and patiently endure suffering so that we too may become saints.