

# Lent: Denying Ourselves and Picking Up The Cross

**Objective:** Some wonder how to reconcile the evil and suffering in the world with a God who is all-powerful and all-good. We know God loves us, so why does he permit us and those we love to suffer? He answered this when He became one of us and took on our pain and suffering and sin. His death on the cross for you and for me is the greatest act of love ever performed. And it does not end there. To be called to suffering in this life is to be called into the mystery of Christ's Passion and to cooperate in the redemption of mankind. By dedicating our suffering to Him, we can pick up one small sliver of Christ's cross and carry it.

**Song Suggestion:** Lift High the Cross (785)

## Bible and Catechism Readings: –

### Romans 5:3-5

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

### Luke 9:23-25

Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

### 1 Peter 4:13

But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

### 2 Corinthians 1:6

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

### 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

### Catechism 618

The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men." But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]," for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps." In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.

Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.

**Saint:** St. Lidwina was born into a poor country family of Holland in 1380. At an early age, she prayed to the Mother of God and experienced visions of incredible religious images. When she was 15, she went ice-skating

with some friends and fell. She broke a rib from this fall, but gangrene continued to consume her body. No medical professional could diagnose her injury, and this began her martyrdom.

As the gangrene spread throughout her body, she became permanently paralyzed. Pieces of her body even fell off, and she suffered from external bleeding. Despite these medical complications, Saint Lidwina never gave up on her faith in God. She engaged in constant prayer and commitment in her faith to God.

She continued to experience great pain for the rest of her life, but she was rewarded with visions of faith from God. She died in 1433 at age 53. She was canonized by Pope Leo XII in 1890. Today, she serves as an inspiration for chronically-ill patients and those with multiple sclerosis.

**Vignette:** – Towards the end of St. Mark’s life, he is arrested during the passover when he travels to take the message of Jesus to Egypt. The account explains, “While there seizing him, they threw a mooring rope around his neck and dragged him.. but while the holy Mark was being dragged along, he offered up thanksgiving to the savior Christ, saying, “I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, that I have been counted worthy to suffer these things on behalf of your name.” being dragged as skin and flesh is being torn from him by the stones.

When evening had fallen, they threw him in prison, and deliberated upon the manner of death by which they should destroy him. But in the middle of the night, after the doors had been shut and the guards stationed at the doors, behold, a great earthquake occurred. For an angel of the Lord, coming from heaven touched him saying, “O Mark, slave of God, chief of the saints in Egypt, behold your name has been inscribed in a book of eternal life and counted along with the holy apostles. Behold, your memorial shall never be forsaken. You have become a companion of the powers above in heaven.”

Having seen this vision, the blessed Mark, his hands outstretched, said, “I thank you, my Lord Jesus Christ, that you did not desert me, but you have numbered me with the saints. I beseech you, O Lord Jesus Christ, to welcome my soul and not reject me from your grace.”

The next morning, the pagans took St. Mark from the prison. They tied his neck with a thick rope and did the same as the day before, dragging him over the rocks and stones. Finally, St. Mark delivered up his pure soul in the hand of God, and received the crown of martyrdom, the apostolic crown, the crown of evangelism, and the crown of virginity.

Mark had written down the Gospel, had heard the stories. But he now experienced the Gospel of the Son of God himself. This was the suffering Son of God who was not far off and incapable of understanding his suffering—This is a God who underwent the same suffering.

### Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Think about a situation where you or a loved one experienced pain and suffering. Looking back, was there even the slightest scenario in which some sort of good came about out as a result?

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In what ways can you view suffering as a means in which God can work toward his plan or glory?

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Has God ever used pain and suffering in your life to get your attention? What was he attempting to get across to you?

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Have you ever dedicated your suffering to a higher purpose? Praying for God to use your suffering to help someone else?

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Is a time you overcame hardship that you think others will benefit from hearing? What did you learn?

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### **Resources:**

1. Article: Why Does God Allow Suffering? <http://www.integratedcatholiclife.org/2011/07/bickerstaff-why-does-god-allow-suffering/>
2. Book: "Why Suffer" by Mary Ann Budnik. <http://www.scepterpublishers.org/product/index.php?FULL=312>
3. Why Does God Let Us Suffer? (A Catholic Perspective) Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan  
<http://www.users.qwest.net/~dkturner/why9.html>

### **Action Plan:**

1. Think about some ways in which pain or hardship you are currently suffering could be used to help God fulfill some sort of purpose for good.
2. Think of any past situation in which you may have blamed God for your suffering. How does God's allowing of free will and evil in the world fit into this picture?
3. This week, consider prayerfully asking God to reveal to you ways in which you can view suffering as a means of glorifying Him.

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