

# Lent: Denying Ourselves and Picking Up The Cross

**Objective:** To examine evil and suffering's presence in our world and how Catholic men can deepen their relationship with Jesus despite it. We know God loves us, so why does he permit suffering? When THE WORD, became flesh He took on our pain and suffering and sin. To experience 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 Jesus, 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?"

### 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.

### 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. (<https://ikemiller.com/mark-11-the-suffering-son-of-god/>)

Saint Mark gave his life in suffering to receive the reward of Eternal Life. What do we learn from his example?

### Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

As in our vignette, Saints often suffered along their journey to heaven. What adjustments to your view on suffering might help you realize heaven too?

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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  
[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/595505.Why\\_Does\\_God\\_Let\\_Us\\_Suffer\\_a\\_Catholic\\_Perspective](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/595505.Why_Does_God_Let_Us_Suffer_a_Catholic_Perspective)

### **Action Plan:**

1. Think about some ways in which pain or hardship you are currently suffering, how might its' consequences be useful to God for good.
2. Do you blame God for your suffering. How might you process that feeling differently to grow your love for Him?
3. Prayerfully ask God to reveal ways you can endure suffering as a means of glorifying Him.

**Author:** Kurt Buckman (Updated from Scott Stubbins)