

## The Pain That Gives Birth

When God the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit were contemplating the creation of humanity, they were concerned with our ability to be free. If they were to create us in their own "image and likeness," we needed a free-will. God is "all-knowing," which means that the Trinity knew ahead of time that their creation would rebel and need to be saved. This is when they talked about the Cross as the way to bring humanity back to God. It was decided to proceed, knowing that a painful sacrifice lay ahead for God's only Son.

Every time the good news of a child being born is announced, a sacrificial act of love is known to have taken place. How are we to understand the inter-dependant relationship between new life and pain?

For us to grow in the image and likeness of God, we need to understand the role pain plays in the spiritual life. The Holy Scriptures point to several understandings of pain. depending upon the circumstances, pain may be understood in very different ways. Job's pain was wrongfully understood by Elihu, who said it was because Job needed to be disciplined that he had forfeited everything.

"Man is also disciplined with pain upon his bed, and with continual strife in his bones... to bring back their souls from the Pit, that he may see the light of life." (Job 33:19-30) Elihu was wrong. Job was not in need of correction; he was righteous. A righteous man suffers for no apparent reason. Here lies the mistake most people make in attempting to understand pain. Pain is not always linked with an explanation. To struggle with the "why?" often leads us nowhere. The real question according to Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, is not "why?" but "when?". When bad things happen what is our response?

Perhaps pain may lead one back in repentance to God. Yet, in the case of Job, he was righteous and never cursed God even after his family was taken from him. The suffering of Job was more to demonstrate his undying love and devotion for God regardless of the circumstances. Job was being perfected. For love to be true, it must be tested by the fire of our sufferings.

Our faith in Christ is constantly being put to the test. Is our devotion to God based on pure motives, or do we use God when we need something?

God allows our love for Him to be tested not for His sake but for ours. Often we fool ourselves into thinking we have given our lives to Christ; however, as soon as a trial approaches, we act as if we had never known God. Christians are continually tested so that our love and devotion to God may become pure.

It's often difficult to understand our sufferings and pain. Whether it's the turmoil of raising a child; leaving our family; a failed marriage; a financial crisis; or the loss of a loved one; each is an opportunity for our love of God to become pure.

In the Kingdom of God, the entire Church will be gathered. There will be Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, and anyone else whom God blesses to enjoy His Paradise. What each will have in common is that they will all know God and be known by Him. Each will have had a genuine faith that was based upon unconditional love for God. Each will have understood the trials, sufferings, and pains of life in a way similar to how God felt when he decided to create us. Each will have carried a Cross that purifies and cleanses our devotion to God.

The Church defines discipleship as the act of denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and then following Christ. Discipleship begins the moment we decide to learn from the Master and submit our lives to Him, ready for the trials that will refine our love of God. For our love of God to be free from being self-centered, we must be with Christ where ever He is. The twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew states clearly that Christ is to be found with those who are in pain. He is with those who have been forgotten by everyone and thirst to be loved. He is with the prisoners who have been locked-up and rejected. He is with those who are lonely and have no one. Christ told His disciples that it was their charge to be with these people as disciples of Christ. This requires sacrifice, suffering, and pain!

Christ needs our hands to hold the hands of those who are in need. Are we free from serving ourselves enough to want to help?

He needs our hearts to carry the burden of others so that they may not be left alone. Are our hearts hardened to others because of self-pity?

He needs our minds so that we may initiate alternatives for those in distress and lighten their painful choices. Are we so preoccupied with our daily chores that we have no time left to volunteer and help?

He needs our eyes to look into the souls of the suffering so that they may see light in us. Are our eyes too fixed in the mirror that they never see anyone else?

May our love for God be continually blessed by trials so that we may see clearly the purity of our love for Him.

In Christ's Love,  
+Fr. Andrew Barakos