IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Thy Will Be Done
At the Cross her station keeping, 
stood the mournful Mother weeping, 
close to her Son to the last.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing, 
all His bitter anguish bearing, 
now at length the sword has passed.

O how sad and sore distressed 
was that Mother, highly blest, 
of the sole-begotten One.

Christ above in torment hangs, 
she beneath beholds the pangs 
of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep, 
whelmed in miseries so deep, 
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Can the human heart refrain 
from partaking in her pain, 
in that Mother's pain untold?

For the sins of His own nation, 
She saw Jesus wracked with torment, 
All with scourges rent:

She beheld her tender Child, 
Saw Him hang in desolation, 
Till His Spirit forth He sent.

O thou Mother! fount of Love! 
Touch my Spirit from above, 
make my heart with thine accord:

Make me feel as thou hast felt; 
make my Soul to glow and melt 
with the Love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother! pierce me through, 
in my heart each wound renew 
of my Saviour crucified:

Let me share with thee His pain, 
who for all my sins was slain, 
who for me in torments died.

Let me mingle tears with thee, 
mourning Him who mourned for me, 
all the days that I may live:

By the Cross with thee to stay, 
there with thee to weep and pray, 
is all I ask of thee to give.

Virgin of all virgins blest!, 
Listen to my fond request: 
let me share thy grief divine;

Let me, to my latest breath, 
in my body bear the death 
of that dying Son of thine.

Wounded with His every wound, 
steep my soul till it hath swooned, 
in His very Blood away;

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh, 
lest in flames I burn and die, 
in His awful Judgment Day.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence, 
be Thy Mother my defense, 
be Thy Cross my victory;

While my body here decays, 
may my Soul Thy goodness praise, 
Safe in Paradise with Thee.
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Dear Friends,

The Covid-19 pandemic reveals just how vulnerable we are to events which are entirely beyond our control. In this world we don’t have to go in search of trouble. Trouble is going to find us and we are going to suffer.

Unavoidable suffering of one kind or another is quiet simply a reality with which we have to learn how to cope. St. Pope John Paul II by word and example teaches us that we can do more than merely cope, we can transcend our suffering, we can embrace all the sufferings that this life present and transform them into a life-giving Grace for the good of ourselves, our families and our World.

St. Pope John Paul’s 1984 Apostolic Letter ‘On the Christian Meaning of Suffering’ bears careful consideration in the midst of these troubled times. A completely reformatted, easy-to-read and easy-to-Pray-over version of the Holy Father’s magisterial letter is freely accessible on our ACN-Ireland website and I would encourage you, your family and friends to check it out, study it if you can and consult it when in need. (An overview to St. John Paul’s great letter is provided herein.) When we think of St. John Paul we cannot do so without recalling one of his signature messages: ‘Be Not Afraid’. Not surprisingly then his 1984 letter sets out with great Spiritual insight and great Theological heft his basic reasoning as to why no Faith-filled follower of Christ need be fearful.

On the contrary as far as St. John Paul is concerned rather than fear every enlightened Christian should experiences Joy. Joy? Joy at the understanding that every single one of us is called to personally participate in Christ’s Salvific Mission as part of His Mystical Body. As Christians we are all invited to share in His Redemptive Suffering.

For us Christians then all our sufferings can have meaning and does have meaning when our suffering is joined to that of Christ and offered up to God for His Greater Glory and the Salvation of Humanity.

Moreover for us Christians we don’t have to suffer alone but we suffer together, together

• with Christ Himself,
• with each other,
• with the Choirs of Angels,
• with the Communion of Saints and most significantly
• with Mary, the Blessed Mother of God and Mother of His Church.
We should never forget that throughout all our suffering and sorrows Mary is there to accompany us and no one Saint in Heaven knows this better than St. Pope John Paul who has left us a wonderfully inspired Apostolic Letter On the Most Holy Rosary to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This Apostolic Letter is well-referenced here within and it can be read in full on our ACN Ireland website.

For St. John Paul, the Rosary is a ‘marvellous’ prayer: in fact it was his favourite Prayer. It is a Prayer for all times in every age. For the troubled times we are in, praying the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary is particularly apt.

For this reason we have prepared and present herein a set of Scripture readings and reflections associated with the Passion of Our Lord which I hope will be of benefit to you as you privately and communally take comfort from praying the Sorrowful Mysteries during these difficult days and in the weeks and months to come.

As most of us are aware St. Pope John Paul was an exceptional witness to the Truth and lived a heroic life of suffering, of Hope and of Joy. In his native Poland he lived in very troubled times and as a man ‘from a far country’ he worked tirelessly to bring us closer to God through His Blessed Mother: ‘Totus TUUS’, (‘All Yours’) was his Papal motto in keeping with his personal Consecration to Mary.

As Pope, St John Paul had the distinction of Canonising a fellow Pole, Sr. Faustina Kowalska of the Blessed Sacrament on the 30 April 2000. St. Faustina as we all know inspired the great devotion of the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy.

In the midst of our present troubles and in the midst of all our troubles there is always great Spiritual comfort and value in calling out to God and pleading:

‘For the sake of His (Your Son’s)
Sorrowful Passion
Have Mercy on us and on the Whole World’.

Dear Friends, in the midst of these troubled times, always please remember that you are not alone in your sorrows and tribulations.

- We are in this together.
- We are part of Christ’s Mystical Body.
- We are participating in His Redemptive Work.
- We are Catholic and we are on a Mission: ‘to lead all Souls to Heaven especially those most in need of God’s Mercy’.

Your Brother in Christ,

Michael

Dr. Michael Kinsella
DIRECTOR, ACN IRELAND
Dear Friends,

2020 will no doubt go down in the history books as the Year of the Coronavirus. Nevertheless, it is not the virus, but God who determines the course of human history and directs it towards the good. Over the course of the millennia He sent prophets to point the way to salvation. Finally, He sent His Son to redeem the world and so that we could become children of God (cf. Galatians 4:4-5). But even after this great turning point in history, God has never ceased to help us through His Saints.

Today He is even sending the Mother of God – and sending her to every continent – in order to sustain us in our great need. That is why the current era is called the Marian Age.

Contrary to all the predictions of the scientists, Mary is promising us a future filled with joy and peace, although at the same time she does not conceal the fact that people are in need of purification and that painful situations lie ahead. She has shown us simple means for combating disaster – means that everyone can employ:

- faithfully reciting the Rosary,
- reconciliation, consecration to her Immaculate Heart,
- reading Scripture,
- making personal sacrifices out of Love,
- frequenting the Sacraments.

The Marian Age began with a medal. In 1830, in the Rue du Bac in Paris, Our Lady appeared to a simple nun, Sister Catherine Labouré.

She spoke to her of the painful times that lay ahead for the world. ‘All will seem lost’, she told her and revealed to her an image for a medal.
It portrayed Our Lady standing on the globe with hands outstretched, the serpent crushed beneath her feet. On her hands were rings from which emanated rays of light.

Sister Catherine heard these words inwardly: ‘These rays are the symbol of the Graces obtained by Mary for mankind.’

Some of the rings emitted no light, however. Our Lady explained: ‘These are the Graces you forget to ask of me!’

Around the oval image were the words in gold letters:

‘O Mary, conceived without sin, 
Pray for us who have recourse to Thee!’

Then the image turned round. On the reverse side were 12 stars and the letter ‘M’ intertwined with the Cross.

Beneath this were the two wounded hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Then Sister Catherine heard these words:

‘Have a medal struck according to this image. Those who constantly wear it and repeat this short invocation with devotion will experience the special protection of the Mother of God.’

In 1832 the first 2,000 medals were struck, at the very time when cholera was raging in France. There were countless miraculous healings and conversions – so many, in fact, that the medal quickly became known as the ‘Miraculous Medal’.

Dear Friends, during these troubled times let us take Mary into our hearts and homes so that she may reign within us, comfort us and bring us peace of heart and soul.

My grateful blessing on you all.

Father Martin Barta
ECCLESIASTICAL ASSISTANT, ACN INTERNATIONAL
St. John Paul was in third grade when his mother died; his only sibling, an older brother, died three years later; he discovered his father dead on the floor in their apartment. Karol Wojtyla was an orphan at twenty. Nor were his troubles were not limited to the loss of his whole family.

The Nazis overran his country, and he did hard labour in a stone quarry. During the Nazi rule, many of his friends were killed, some in concentration camps, others shot by the Gestapo for the crime of studying for the Priesthood. He was run down by a German truck and nearly died.

When the Nazis finally left Poland, he and his countrymen again came under the rule of another dictator when the iron boot of Joseph Stalin replaced that of Adolf Hitler.

Later in life, his beloved Church was torn apart by the storm that followed the Second Vatican Council.

At the age of sixty, on the 13 May 1981, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, an Islamic assassin shot him four times in St. Peter’s Square and he nearly died again. In which regard an Italian parliamentary investigative commission reporting in 2006 declared itself convinced ‘believes, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the leadership of the Soviet Union took the initiative to eliminate Pope John Paul.’ This assassination attempt is believed to have fulfilled the third Secret of Fatima and John Paul believed the Our Lady’s hand saved his life that day.

As an old man, he suffered from debilitating Parkinson’s disease that rendered him immobile, distorted his physical appearance, and finally took his ability to speak.

Pope John Paul II knew about human suffering as much as any human being can. Yet, he was a man overflowing with joy and Hope, as was evident to all who saw or met him.

He experienced the Mystery of suffering and the affliction endured by every single human person, but he also discovered the meaning of suffering. He had found an ‘answer’ to the problem of pain.
He explored this theme in his apostolic letter Salvifici Doloris (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering). Suffering is part of human existence from birth until death, and every human person suffers in a variety of ways: physically, psychologically, socially, and Spiritually. The Bible provides many examples: one’s own death, the danger of death, the death of children or friends, homesickness, persecution, mockery, scorn, loneliness, abandonment, remorse, watching the wicked prosper while the just suffer, the unfaithfulness of spouse and friends, and the misfortunes of one’s homeland (SD 6).

Suffering in one form or another accompanies each of us every day. It is an inescapable feature of human existence.

Suffering naturally leads to questioning:
• Why do I suffer?
• Why do others suffer?
• How can suffering be overcome?
• Is there any meaning to suffering?

To find an answer, John Paul turned to Revelation:

In order to perceive the true answer to the ‘why’ of suffering, we must look to the revelation of Divine Love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a Mystery: We are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the Mystery and to discover the ‘why’ of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of Divine Love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering . . . we must above all accept the Light of Revelation . . .

Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ. (SD 13)

For John Paul, the story of Jesus Christ is the story of humanity. Every human life is a question, and it is the Lord who answers the question. Therefore we must look to Christ to understand the meaning of suffering. But our understanding of God is fragile and incomplete, because we are not capable of comprehending pure Love and Goodness. It follows, then, that our understanding of suffering cannot be definitive. This is especially true when we are dealing with suffering in its subjective dimension. Words fall far short when we are undergoing suffering, and reasoning cannot remedy the profound sense of the offensiveness of suffering.

In looking for an answer to the ‘problem of pain,’ the Pope avoided reducing all suffering to a single justification but looked at various aspects and meanings of suffering. Reducing suffering to a single solution does not do justice to its complexities.

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Sometimes suffering makes an important good possible. If God eliminated that suffering, the corresponding good also would be eliminated.

We could say that suffering… is present in order to unleash Love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one’s ‘I’ on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer.

The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish Love that stirs in his heart and actions. (SD 29)

HUMILITY

Suffering can bring us closer to what is good and can draw us away from obstacles to achieving happiness. Pain can prompt rehabilitation, a turning from evil to embrace stronger relationships with others and with God (SD 12).

Suffering breaks down that most fundamental of human proclivities: our desire to be God. The atheistic existentialist Jean Paul Sartre wrote: ‘To be man is to reach toward being God. Or, if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God.’

The original sin of Adam and Eve was an attempt to reorder the universe so they could determine what is good and what is evil. This is replicated in every human sin. The sinner orders the universe according to his own Will and sets aside the Will of God.

Suffering is Redemptive in part because it reveals to man that he is not God, rendering him more receptive to the Divine:

To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the Salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ.

In Him God has confirmed His desire to act especially through suffering, which is man’s weakness and emptying of self, and He wishes to make His power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self. (SD 23)

Only when we are weak do many of us rely on God and explicitly repudiate our own Divine ambitions.

History provides many examples of sinners transformed into Saints through suffering.

Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special Grace.

To this Grace many saints, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and others, owe their profound conversion.

A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the Salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of his entire life and vocation. (SD 26)

It may be that some suffering is permitted by God as a way of waking someone from a dream of self-sufficiency or illusory happiness. Life-saving surgery is painful.

Suffering can serve as punishment for wrongdoing, a just retribution for personal sins.

The friends of Job sought to universalise this judgment, falsely concluding that all suffering is the direct result of a person’s sin. If Job is punished, they reasoned, he must have sinned against God. But the innocent do suffer:

While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment.

The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament. (SD 11)

In the New Testament, Christ teaches the same truth by His Passion. The Lamb of God—who is entirely without fault—endured rejection, beating, taunting, flogging, and crucifixion at the hands of evil men. By suffering Himself, the Son of God removed the moral stigma from suffering. No longer could it be said that personal suffering always indicates moral failure nor that it is a sign of God’s abandonment or disfavour.

Punishment

Often our sinful actions lead directly to painful repercussions—

- unreasonable anger to injured relationships,
- laziness to lack of achievement.

In the New Testament, Christ teaches the same truth by His Passion. The Lamb of God—who is entirely without fault—endured rejection, beating, taunting, flogging, and crucifixion at the hands of evil men. By suffering Himself, the Son of God removed the moral stigma from suffering. No longer could it be said that personal suffering always indicates moral failure nor that it is a sign of God’s abandonment or disfavour.
Christ Suffers For Us

Christ strikes at the root of our sin and our suffering by overcoming evil with good. Indeed, the suffering of Christ overcomes the worst possible suffering of the human person—permanent alienation from God, the source and summit of all goodness.

All suffering in this life—like all happiness—is imperfect, partial, and finite. Even the worst possible human life, spread over the longest spans, comes to an end. Hell does not. It lasts forever. In comparison to the pains of Hell, the worst human suffering on earth pales. Jesus saves His people from Hell.

Jesus saves us from the suffering by entering into it. The physical pain endured by Christ is well beyond what most of us have personally experienced:
- beaten by soldiers,
- imprisoned,
- scourged at the pillar,
- crowned with thorns,
- forced to carry the cross, and finally
- dying by crucifixion.

His suffering has human dimensions; it also is unique in the history of humanity—a depth and intensity that, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only begotten Son Himself: ‘God from God.’

Therefore, only He—the only begotten Son—is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: In every sin and in ‘total’ sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth. (SD 17)

John Paul echoes a long tradition, going back at least to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, that the physical, mental, and Spiritual suffering of Christ was the greatest human suffering possible. In addition to the physical pain of the Passion, He endured the greatest pain of all: alienation from the heavenly Father caused by the totality of human sin.

The only begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against definitive suffering.

In His Salvific mission, the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history. These transcendental roots of evil are grounded in sin and death: for they are at the basis of the loss of eternal life.

The mission of the only begotten Son consists in conquering sin and death.
- He conquers sin by His obedience unto death, and
- He overcomes death by His Resurrection. (SD 14)
What comes of this great suffering? What is its purpose in the Divine Plan?

From the greatest possible evil, God brings about the greatest good: the Salvation of the human family, Redemption from pain and suffering for those who do not merit it.

Precisely by means of this suffering [Jesus] must bring it about ‘that man should not perish, but have eternal life.’ (SD 16)

The suffering of Christ redeems suffering itself and opens up the possibility that the sufferer can share in the Redemptive work of Christ (SD 19).

The suffering of Christ leads to His Glory; so, too, does the suffering of Christians.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account’ (Matt. 5:10–11).

John Paul wrote:

Christ has in a sense opened His own Redemptive Suffering to all human suffering. . . . Christ has accomplished the world’s Redemption through His own suffering. For, at the same time, this Redemption, even though it was completely achieved by Christ’s Suffering, lives on and in its own special way develops in the history of man.

It lives and develops as the Body of Christ, the Church, and in this dimension every human suffering, by reason of the loving union with Christ, completes the suffering of Christ. It completes that suffering just as the Church completes the Redemptive Work of Christ. (SD 24)

The Christian approach to the problem of pain does not imply an indifference to human suffering, and for this reason Christians have always sought to express their Faith in charitable works.

The works of Christ were to restore sight to the blind, heal the leper, and give food to the hungry. He taught that we should Love God and neighbour and gave us the Parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the duty of all Christians to look after the needs of others. Final Judgment hinges on our care for suffering people:

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me. (Matt. 25:34-35)
The problem of real pain is concrete, experiential, and personal. Its resolution does not come through words but through THE WORD alone. As the great Pope put it:

*Christ does not answer directly and He does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ’s saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ.*

The answer that comes through this sharing, by way of the interior encounter with the Master, is in itself something more than the mere abstract answer to the question about the meaning of suffering. For it is above all a call. It is a vocation.

*Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else He says: ‘Follow me!’ Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the World, a Salvation achieved through My suffering! Through My cross.*

Gradually, as the individual takes up his cross, Spiritually uniting himself to the Cross of Christ, the Salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. (SD 26)

A source of joy is found in the overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering.

This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others and at the same time seems useless to himself.

*The discovery of the Salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling.*

Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person ‘completes what is lacking in Christ’s affictions’; the certainty that in the Spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption he is serving, like Christ, the Salvation of his Brothers and Sisters. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. (SD 27)

The author Victor Frankel in his book Man’s Search for Meaning describes his horrifying experiences in Nazi concentration camps. He notes that although all the prisoners were in the same material circumstances—the most horrible imaginable—they did not all react in the same way.

Some prisoners killed themselves by walking into electrified fences; others clung to life and even found joy despite the atrocities occurring around them daily. What made the difference? One way to put it is that man can endure anything if he has a reason (logos) to live. Conversely, man can endure nothing if he does not.

Apostolic Letters

ACN Ireland’s web editions of St. John Paul’s Apostolic Letters on ‘The Christian Meaning of Suffering’ and on ‘The Rosary of the Virgin Mary’ are available to download.

MIRROR

ACN Ireland’s MIRROR magazine is produced 10 times a year and is distributed free of charge to its friends and supporters. Past issues are available to download.

Faith & Rosary Cards

ACN Ireland’s ever popular pocket sized Faith and Rosary Cards are available to view online and order for FREE.
The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a Prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it is a Prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of Holiness.

It blends easily into the Spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to ‘set out into the deep’ (duc in altum!) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is

- Lord and Saviour,
- ‘the way, and the truth and the life’ (Jn 14:6),
- ‘the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilisation turn’.

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric Prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium.

It is an echo of the Prayer of Mary, her perennial Magnificat for the work of the Redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb.

With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the School of Mary and is led to contem- plate the beauty on the Face of Christ and to experience the depths of His Love.

Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant Grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

Numerous predecessors of mine attributed great importance to this Prayer. Worthy of special note in this regard is Pope Leo XIII who on 1 September 1883 promulgated the Encyclical Supremi Apostolatus Officio, a document of great worth, the first of his many statements about this Prayer, in which he proposed the Rosary as an effective Spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society.
I myself have often encouraged the frequent recitation of the Rosary. Scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I admitted:

‘The Rosary is my favourite Prayer. . . . Against the background of the words Hail Mary (Ave Maria) the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the Soul.

They take shape in the complete series of the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through – we might say – the heart of his Mother.

At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind.

Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple Prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life.’

What has been said so far makes abundantly clear the richness of this traditional Prayer, which has

- the simplicity of a popular devotion but also
- the theological depth of a Prayer suited to those who feel the need for deeper contemplation.

The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this Prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, to its choral recitation and to its constant practice, the most difficult problems.

At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this Prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation.

The grave challenges confronting the world today lead us to think that only an intervention from on high, capable of guiding the hearts of those living in situations of conflict and those governing the destinies of nations, can give reason to hope for a brighter future.

The Rosary is by its nature a Prayer for peace, since it consists in the contemplation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is ‘Our Peace’ (Eph 2:14).

Anyone who assimilates the Mystery of Christ – and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary – learns the secret of peace and makes it his life’s project.

Moreover, by virtue of its meditative character, with the tranquil succession of Hail Marys, the Rosary has a peaceful effect on those who Pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 14:27; 20.21).
The Rosary is also a Prayer for peace because of the fruits of charity which it produces.

When prayed well in a truly meditative way, the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his Mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted.

- How could one possibly contemplate the Mystery of the Child of Bethlehem, in the joyful Mysteries, without experiencing the desire to welcome, defend and promote life, and to shoulder the burdens of suffering children all over the world?

- How could one possibly follow in the footsteps of Christ the Revealer, in the Mysteries of light, without resolving to bear witness to his ‘Beatitudes’ in daily life? And

- How could one contemplate Christ carrying the Cross and Christ Crucified, without feeling the need to act as a ‘Simon of Cyrene’ for our Brothers and Sisters weighed down by grief or crushed by despair? Finally,

- How could one possibly gaze upon the glory of the Risen Christ or of Mary Queen of Heaven, without yearning to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God’s Plan?

In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world.

By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ’s invitation to ‘Pray ceaselessly’ (Lk 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult ‘battle’ for peace can be won.

Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God’s Help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to ‘Love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony’ (Col 3:14).

A Prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the entire Christian community. I therefore urge all of you, dear Brothers and Sisters of every state of life, to rediscover the Rosary…
- in the light of Scripture,
- in harmony with the Liturgy, and
- in the context of your daily lives.

In times of trouble
The Gospels give great prominence to the Sorrowful Mysteries of Christ. From the beginning, Christian piety... has focused on the individual moments of the Passion, realising that here is found the culmination of the Revelation of God’s Love and the source of our Salvation.

The Rosary selects certain moments from the Passion, inviting the faithful to contemplate them in their hearts and to relive them.

The sequence of meditations begins with Gethsemane, where Christ experiences a moment of great anguish before the Will of the Father, against which the weakness of the flesh would be tempted to rebel. There Jesus encounters all the temptations and confronts all the sins of humanity, in order to say to the Father: ‘Not My Will but Yours be done’ (Lk 22:42 and parallels).

This ‘Yes’ of Christ reverses the ‘No’ of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. And the cost of this faithfulness to the Father’s Will is made clear in the following Mysteries: by
• His scourging,
• His crowning with thorns,
• His carrying the Cross and
• His Death on the Cross,… the Lord is cast into the most abject suffering: Ecce homo!

This abject suffering reveals not only the Love of God but also the meaning of man himself. Ecce homo: the meaning, origin and fulfilment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles Himself out of Love ‘even unto death, death on a Cross’ (Phil 2:8).

The Sorrowful Mysteries help the believer…
• to relive the Death of Jesus,
• to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary,
• to enter with her into the depths of God’s Love for man and
• to experience all its life-giving power.
**Scripture Reading**

Luke 22:39-46 – Then going out He went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him. When He arrived at the place He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not undergo the test.’

After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, He Prayed, saying, ‘Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me; still, not My will but Yours be done.’

And to strengthen Him an angel from Heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and He Prayed so fervently that His sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.

When He rose from Prayer and returned to His disciples, He found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and Pray that you may not undergo the test.’
Meditation in the Time of Covid-19

It’s instinctive for us to recoil from times of uncertainty, suffering and pain. And it’s natural for us, as a byproduct of our first parents’ act of disobedience at Eden, to always want control. The challenge for us, when faced with trials, is to open our hearts and minds to acceptance of God’s providential care.

The struggles Christ faced in the Garden of Gethsemane — fear, anxiety, helplessness, etc. — have been experienced by us all. Currently, the challenges we face in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic are many:

- distance from our friends and family,
- unemployment and new financial burdens,
- the threat and reality of sickness and death

In their face, we might not be able to Pray as we ought, we might feel alone, and our thinking can be clouded by temptations to doubt and the pressure of the circumstances.

This is what Christ faced the night before everything — His friends, His family, His clothes, His life — was to be stripped away from Him.

But His example compels us to trust that all the sufferings we must carry in this life have a Divine purpose. Let us embrace God’s Will above all else by echoing the words of Jesus: ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done’ (Lk 22:42).

Further Points for Meditation

Jesus ‘expresses the horror that death represented for His human nature’ - Catechism, 612.

‘By accepting in His human Will that the Father’s Will be done, He accepts His death as Redemptive’ - Catechism, 612.

‘Father, if You are willing …’ It is no shame to Pray, and hope for, pain to pass me by …

‘Still, not My Will but Yours’ – But I should remember that sometimes God wants me to accept suffering for a greater purpose.

The disciples disobey Christ’s command not because they are ‘wicked’ but because they give in to their desire for easy comfort. That’s often the reason we sin.
The Second Sorrowful Mystery:
The Scourging at the Pillar

Christ is scourged by the soldiers at Pilate’s command.

Scripture Reading

Mark 15:6-15 – Now on the occasion of the feast he used to release to them one prisoner whom they requested. A man called Barabbas was then in prison along with the rebels who had committed murder in a rebellion. The crowd came forward and began to ask him to do for them as he was accustomed.

Pilate answered, ‘Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?’ For he knew that it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.

Pilate again said to them in reply, ‘Then what do you want me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’ They shouted again, ‘Crucify Him.’

Pilate said to them, ‘Why? What evil has He done?’ They only shouted the louder, ‘Crucify Him.’ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed Him over to be crucified.
Meditation in the Time of Covid-19

God’s own Son took the punishment that rightly belonged to us. The beatings and blows that He endured were accepted willingly, out of Love for each of us. As the prophet Isaiah foretold, ‘By His wounds we were healed’ (53:5). Objectively speaking, Jesus’s scourging was an injustice beyond comparison.

In our own lives, we face difficulties and sufferings. Often we do not give much consideration to their meaning beyond feeling a sense of injustice. That means we can be tempted to grow angry, embittered and resentful. How do we process it all without giving into depression and despair? The answer lies in joining our sufferings to those of Christ.

When imitating Christ’s Sacrifice, accepting our sufferings in accord with God’s Will and making of them an offering, our sufferings can be transformed as offerings of Love. Rather than occasions for self-pity, transforming our suffering in Christ becomes a means to participate in His work of Salvation.

In the end, the only way to make sense of life’s sufferings — especially important to remember in these times of so much sorrow — is by understanding it all through the transformative Love of Christ’s Passion. We wonder:

• Why do bad things happen to good people?
• Why has this virus attacked the world so viciously?
• Why must we suffer?

Let’s ask God for the Grace to see through the pain, take each step forward in Faith, and embrace what He has given us, confident in the Hope that ‘does not disappoint’ (Rom 5:5).

Further Points for Meditation

A handle held together three leather whips in the kind of scourges used on Christ. At the ends were spiky pieces of bone or lead. Roman scourges would tear away flesh and the victim would lose blood, weakening him for crucifixion. The soldiers avoided striking over the heart, to keep the condemned man alive.

‘Christ’s whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. His own share it with Him’ -Catechism, 530.

If He suffered this for me, there is nothing I should refuse to do for Him. Consider small ‘scourges’ to suffer for Love of Christ.

When I give in to angry or vengeful thoughts and make cutting remarks or judgmental gossip, I behave like the soldiers. When I leave cutting remarks unanswered or let judgmental thoughts die in my mind, I behave like Christ.

In the garden, Heaven’s help was obvious – an angel. In the scourging, the interior grace of Hope is His only help. I can expect the same sometimes.

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The Third Sorrowful Mystery: The Crowning With Thorns

Soldiers weave a crown of thorns and place it on Christ’s head.

Scripture Reading

John 19:1-8 – Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on His head, and clothed Him in a purple cloak, and they came to Him and said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck Him repeatedly.

Once more Pilate went out and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing Him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak.

And he said to them, ‘Behold, the Man!’ When the chief priests and the guards saw Him they cried out, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’

Pilate said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves and crucify Him. I find no guilt in Him.’

The Jews answered, ‘We have a law, and according to that law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.’

Now when Pilate heard this statement, he became even more afraid.
Meditation in the Time of Covid-19

Christ’s crown was a sign of contradiction; the crown he received was not the crown he deserved. Both acclaimed and denounced as King of the Jews, He received the crown of one whose Kingdom was ‘not of this world.’ Those who follow Christ rightfully crown Him by inviting Him to reign over our hearts. This means we follow ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life.’

In bearing a crown of thorns, Christ the King raises the dignity of humanity. He gives new meaning to life in this ‘Valley of Tears.’

He opens our hearts to all who suffer and gives meaning and purpose to all our own suffering. That can be difficult to understand, especially when so many are suffering from the outbreak of a deadly virus or from anxiety, from separation from family and community and from the inability to receive the sacraments.

But Christ reigns when we invite Him to enter our hearts, when in imitation of Him we conform ourselves according to God’s Will, and when we imitate His unbounded Charity.

As citizens of Christ’s Kingdom, supported by His grace, may we dare to live by His example: ‘No one has greater Love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’ (Jn 15:13).

Further Points for Meditation

When He fed the multitudes, they wanted to make him King. But thorns were the only crown He accepted. That there was something special about Christ was obvious to many at a glance. This is what gave the soldiers their delight when they mocked Him.

‘Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father’ - Catechism, 615.

‘There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer’ - Catechism, 605.

The blood vessels in the face bleed profusely. The crown of thorns made it difficult for Christ to see. The crown of thorns is an antidote to self-pity, to prevent me crowning myself for my own slight sufferings.

Empty religious practice is like crowning Christ with thorns. Even the Rosary can be an empty crown if I ‘say’ it without trying to ‘Pray’ it.

THE FATIMA PRAYER

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Your Mercy.

The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery: The Carrying of the Cross

Jesus struggles up Calvary with his own cross on his shoulders.

Scripture Reading

John 19:16-22 – Then he handed Him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the Cross Himself He went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.

There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle.

Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the Cross. It read, ‘Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews.’

Now many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write “The King of the Jews,” but that he said, “I am the King of the Jews.”’ Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’
Meditation in the Time of Covid-19

Along the road to Calvary, while carrying the Cross burdened with the sins of the world, Jesus encountered the goodness of friends and strangers.

These models of charity console Jesus’ heart during His final agony and give Him an opportunity to rest His weary body.

Those who helped Christ or encountered Him on the way to Calvary did so knowing they could face harm themselves. But they put their lives on the line to help Jesus carry His Cross, wipe His bloodied and sweaty face, or give Him a glance or word of Love to alleviate His pain.

In the face of the current pandemic, healthcare professionals across the globe are doing the same in service to their sick Brothers and Sisters. Great are the sacrifices they make.

Long is the list of selfless doctors, nurses and medical personnel exhausted from long working hours, often separated from those closest to them for fear of spreading infection, and risking infection themselves.

And long is the list of many others making sacrifices to help keep safe the vulnerable in our midst. May the Blessed Mother, St. Simon of Cyrene, St. Veronica and the women of Jerusalem intercede for them.

Further Points for Meditation

Christ accepted His heavy cross without professing His innocence – because He was carrying it for the guilty. For me.

In the stories of Simon and Veronica, we see that Christ accepted the assistance of others as He redeemed the world.

It is easy to imagine Christ struggling in front of our admiring eyes. But, abandoned by His friends and rejected by the crowd, it’s truer to think of Him being alone.

Christ was a strong man. He fell three times, tradition tells us. Sleepless, scourged, crowned with thorns and carrying a heavy Cross, He kept getting back up.

The Cross I’ve been given has been hand-tested by Christ so that it will be neither too heavy – nor too light.

The Blessed Mother of Jesus was close when her Son was suffering. She’s close when we, her other Sons and Daughters, suffer.

The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery: The Crucifixion

Jesus is nailed to the Cross and dies.

Scripture Reading

John 19:25-30 – Standing by the Cross of Jesus were His Mother and His Mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

When Jesus saw His Mother and the disciple there whom He loved, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold, your Son.’

Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your Mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I thirst.’

There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to His mouth.

When Jesus had taken the wine, He said, ‘It is finished.’ And bowing His head, He handed over the Spirit.
Meditation in the Time of Covid-19

Those who suffer in extreme from coronavirus have difficulty taking even one breath, can identify with the Crucified Christ as He hung on the Cross. The weight of one’s body pressed against the lungs is what ultimately brought death for most crucifixion victims.

No one wants to contract this virus, and so its victims can identify with the sinless Christ killed for our transgressions. As we hear in the first epistle of Peter: ‘He Himself bore our sins in His Body upon the Cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed’ (2:24).

From the Cross, Christ cried out in misery, ‘I thirst’ (Jn 19:28). Those words resonate with the faithful as we face the coronavirus pandemic and its many effects.

Given the serious contagion and associated risk of death, Bishops in many countries have suspended the public celebration of the Mass. As the faithful are left without the consolation of the Sacraments at this moment of crisis, so many hunger and thirst to receive Christ sacramentally in the Eucharist.

Many of the dying, especially the victims of the pandemic, find themselves without the ability to unburden their Souls of sin by Confession to a Priest or receive the Anointing of the Sick. As Jesus, in His final moments, welcomed the Good Thief into Heaven, so we beg the Lord, through the intercession of His Blessed Mother and in His infinite Mercy, to grant Eternal Rest to the Souls of all these Faithful-departed.

Further Points for Meditation

‘It is Love ‘to the end’ that confers on Christ’s sacrifice its value as Redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction’ - Catechism, 616.

It took a great effort for Christ to speak from the Cross; He had to raise Himself up on His wounded hands. Yet He did – to forgive.

Christ died for the very people who were mocking Him, blaspheming Him – and killing Him.

‘He knew and loved us all when He offered His Life’ - Catechism, 616.

‘Apart from the Cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to Heaven’ - Catechism, 618.

‘Since our sins made the Lord Jesus Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew’ - Catechism, 598.

The crucifix teaches us about God’s Mercy – but also about His anger at Sin. We must remember both.
Christ Has died
Christ Is Risen
Christ Will Come Again
Dear Friends,

The coronavirus pandemic has gripped the world for a couple of months now. There is growing uncertainty and alarm; people are seeking consolation and reasons to hope. Is this not precisely the moment to examine ourselves and ask if we truly trust that we are safe only in God’s hands?

This trust is strengthened and deepened through the intercession of the Mother of God, and so we may, and must, turn again and again to the Blessed Virgin Mary for her intercession.

I learnt the following Prayer from my wife,

‘Virgin Mary, help us now,  
Mother of God’s Mercy Thou.  
Thou art mighty, through God’s power,  
Heal and save us at this hour.  
Where man’s help no more avails,  
Thy compassion never fails.  
When we thy children turn to Thee,  
Thou dost always hear our plea.  
In our time of greatest need,  
Mother, to our Prayers give heed.  
Virgin Mary, help us now,  
Mother of God’s Mercy Thou.’

During this troubled time, let us turn again and again in Prayer to the Mother of God and seek refuge in her protection. And in doing so, let us not forget our Brothers and Sisters in Christ’s suffering and persecuted Church, whose needs are as great as ever.

Thank you, as always,

Thomas Heine-Geldern,  
EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT, ACN (INTERNATIONAL)

PLEASE JOIN US IN SUPPORTING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH THROUGH YOUR PRAYERS, FASTING AND ALMSGIVING

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When we eat this Bread
And drink this Cup,
We proclaim Your Death,
Lord Jesus,
Until You come in Glory.

O Mary Conceived without sin,
Pray for us who have recourse to thee