The Link between Love and Suffering
by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on MARCH 19, 2018

As we enter into Holy Week and recall the sufferings of Jesus, let us remember the ‘reason’ for his sufferings: his great love for us. Let us reflect today on the link between suffering and love.

When we are experiencing pain, it is easy for us to long for a world without pain. Imagine a world with no headaches, no misunderstandings, no cancer, no loneliness, no terrorism, no hunger, no wars. Sounds pretty wonderful, no? But if we delve deeper, we see there is often a direct link between suffering and love.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the British journalism and Christian apologist, said he would not want a world devoid of pain. He maintained that everything he had learned that truly enhanced his existence had been learned through suffering. He said, “If it were possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo-jumbo, the results would not be to make life delectable, but to make it trivial and banal to endure.”

This is not to say that pain is good. Sometimes pain is the direct result of people’s evil choices, choices that flow from pride, greed, hatred, lust, and selfishness. We are called to work to alleviate this type of pain. Other pain results from accidents, natural disasters, incurable illnesses—all parts of the human condition. We are called to...
respond to these afflictions with love and compassion, for even these sufferings can be our teachers.

Pope Benedict XVI was asked about ridding the world of all suffering. He said, in order to rid the world of suffering, you would first have to rid the world of love. "Because love always demands an element of self-sacrifice." He added, "And self-sacrifice will always brings with it renunciation and pain."

A few examples might help here:

* Why do we experience so much pain when a loved one dies? Precisely because he or she was our loved one. The pain of our grief is the direct result of our great love.

* Why does it cause us so much heartache when we see our children, grandchildren, or other family members making poor or even dangerous choices? Because we love them so much and care about them.

* Why do we grieve when we see some of the headlines in our news? Because we basically love and care about people, our country, our world.

So this Holy Week let us pray...

Loving God, when I’m experiencing pain and I’m longing for a pain-free world,
	house me to recall that much of my pain is wedded to my love.

I love, therefore I care. I care, therefore I hurt.

Lead me to see that loving always demands self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice always involves a certain amount of suffering.

Give me the grace to embrace the pain in my own life that is a direct result of my loving.
And help me respond to the suffering of others with care and compassion.

I ask for these things through Jesus your Son

who embraced the pain of the cross out of his great love for us. Amen.

Can you give examples of how your suffering is wedded to your love?

What do you think was Jesus' greatest pain as he underwent the crucifixion?

**PS: Thank you!** A big thank you to the 110 women who attended the Lenten luncheon at St. Rita Parish in Solon, OH on Saturday. I really enjoyed being with you and reflecting on HOPE together!

**PS: Upcoming Retreat:** I will be leading a retreat at the Sophia Center in Atchison, Kansas May 15-20. The retreat is entitled “Prayer: Finding God in the Ordinary and Amazing.” The retreat begins at 7:00 pm on Tuesday evening and ends with lunch on Sunday. All are welcome! Visit their website or call Sr. Carol Ann at 913-360-6173 for details.

I reached back in history for today’s song “Were You There?” This song was likely composed by African-American slaves in the 19th Century. It was first printed in 1899. This American spiritual was one of Mahatma Gandhi’s favorite hymns.
What are you thinking and feeling right now about this reflection and/or song? Please feel free to respond below.

Kathleen Magiera March 26, 2018 at 6:14 am

What a great reflection Sr. Melanie!

By the grace of God and with the prayers of others, I was able to give someone close to me another chance after a serious betrayal. Eleven years later, we are still together.
Ed Johnson  March 26, 2018 at 6:30 am

Sr. Melannie,

My wife's and my adult daughter (44) has Down's Syndrome. Through the years, suffering......yes. But oh so much love from, and to, our child. And indeed these deeply felt emotions are vitally linked. I believe one of Jesus' most intense pains from the cross would have been the pain of looking upon His Mother, and the suffering, and love, she felt during those moments. May you have a blessed Holy Week.

Ed J.

Mary  March 26, 2018 at 7:14 am

I feel at peace and loved.

Dorothy  March 26, 2018 at 8:07 am

So very grateful! Music, male voices singing softly. ...penetrating! Am in a quiet third floor choir loft in full view of a huge crucifix. In the quiet, I can use my iPad, listen, read, watch lovely video... just be all-around terribly grateful

Anita  March 26, 2018 at 8:31 am

The question "were you there?" does cause me to tremble when I think of all the chaos in today's world. Terrorism, so many refugees knocking on the doors of nations seeking a peaceful home somewhere in this world, the internet warping of young minds seeking someone trustworthy and solid to believe in, broken relationships tearing families apart, images of children whose lives are cut too short by war and abortion but mostly the images of children alive, suffering and in many cases orphaned by the violence of hatred, racism and war in places like Syria and Myanmar. "Yes, I am here" and the most I can do for these people outside my
reach is to pray for them. However, there are many other people who suffer from broken relationships, violence, poverty and various diseases close to home. The words “were you there?” remind me that I can and must be there for those suffering in my community. As we live through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus this week I know that I am called to be there at the foot of the cross by showing mercy. It is possible to share my food and clothing, to visit the sick, comfort those who are hurting and forgive those who hurt me. Thank you Sister Melannie for reminding me through this song and reflection that His great love must be shared. “YES, I should always be there...at the foot of the cross”!

Jean Canatsey  March 26, 2018 at 10:04 am

The prayer really spoke to me today because every line reflected my life. My husband & I have an adult disabled daughter living with us whose disabilities were primarily caused by poor life choices. We love her deeply but the pain of watching her deteriorate in front of our eyes is terrible. We say we want “our” life back but our love for her prevents it. Even if she didn’t live with us, we would still hurt because the pain/love is carried in our hearts.

“I love, therefore I care. I care, therefore I hurt.”

Have a good Holy Week, Sr. Melannie, and a joyous Easter!

Herb  March 26, 2018 at 11:22 am

Dear Sister Melannie

Amazing never thought of suffering & pain as love but true. Just talked to a grandson yesterday about poor choices in his life. Also yesterday at mass one of our songs. Just read Living Faith You are an inspiration Sister Thanks

Barbara  March 26, 2018 at 12:03 pm

“Were you there?” ... No, but the song is a reminder that I am called to be present to many who are suffering in today’s world – sometimes, not at all easy! A beautiful song that evokes a feeling of sadness .. and gratitude that Jesus died to save ME! Thanks you, Sr. Melannie. Easter blessings!
**Nancy**  March 26, 2018 at 12:06 pm

Mellanie: What a spiritual way to start Easter Week. The song, your reflection and especially your reading in Today's Living Faith. Lots to meditate. Thank you and know the Holy Spirit will be with you in a special way this Easter. Love and prayers, Nancy

**John Hopkins**  March 26, 2018 at 12:41 pm

Hi Mellanie, 
Thank you for this Holy Week Reflection. The prayer was beautiful! I agree with Jean – “I love, therefore I care. I care therefore I hurt.” Beautiful! Profound! May I suggest “Lincoln in the Bardo.” It, too, is a powerful and gripping meditation on love, suffering, care and hurt.

**Patricia Best Defendorf**  March 26, 2018 at 1:29 pm

Ah, what a beautiful rendition of this song! I will take this with me as I journey to retreat with the Erie Benedictine.

**Rosemarie**  March 26, 2018 at 2:49 pm

Sometimes I wonder why my cross is so heavy. My husband suffered a stoke 13 years ago at age 48. He can no longer speak, read or write. As a result we lost the business we ran together. It gets lonely, but HE IS STILL HERE. He still makes me laugh. He is my silent companion. I don’t ask why. God has His reasons and purposes. I must continue to look at our Blessings. Love gives me strength. 
I recently watched the movie “God’s Not Dead”. There was a quote in the movie that really spoke to me. 
–Sometimes the devil allows people to live a life free of trouble because he doesn’t want people turning to God. Their sin is like a jail cell, except it is all nice and comfy and there doesn’t seem to be any reason to leave. The door’s wide
open. Till one day time runs out and the door slams shut and suddenly it's too late to get out—
It's God's love for us that allows us to feel pain and suffering to draw us near to HIM. When you look at it that way, the cross isn't so heavy. God's love lightens the load.

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**Dorothy**  March 26, 2018 at 6:19 pm

A beautiful and profound reflection as we make this journey of Holy Week. Thank you for your inspiring thoughts. Wishing you a glorious Resurrection Feast!

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**Sr Camilla**  March 26, 2018 at 10:19 pm

What a thought provoking reflection on this the 30th anniversary of my Mom's burial. Thanks Sister for putting a healing thought in my mind and in my heart. Warmest Easter greetings and blessings to you.

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**Barbara**  March 27, 2018 at 10:39 am

Sister Melannie,

I love all your reflections but this one really hit home. We all need that little nudge sometimes to remind us that love is ...God's greatest gift!!! and needs to be shared. May His love bring you and your community many blessings this Easter season. Many thanks for all you share.

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