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# A PROMISE OF PRESENCE:

## AN INVITATION TO CO-REDEMPTION BY OFFERING UP OUR SUFFERING

### ROAD MAP

- Part 1: Who God Is (and isn't)
- Part 2: What is Co-Redemption?
- Part 3: How to "Offer It Up"

### AN ANSWER ABOUT THE CROSS, FROM THE CROSS

When a person turns to God in the face of excruciating – often innocent – suffering, he “cannot help noticing that the one to whom he puts the question is himself suffering and wishes to answer him from the Cross, from the heart of his own suffering.”

– John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*

## PART 1. A PROMISE OF PRESENCE: WHO GOD IS (AND ISN'T)

Greeting Card Theology (false or misleading ideas)	Apophatic Theology (truths about who God ISN'T)	Good Theology (truths about who God IS)
“God needed another angel in heaven.”	God doesn’t “need” anything from us. God does not kill us off.	God is complete without us. Death is a reality, not a punishment.
“God’s ways are not our ways, he must have a reason.”	God allows our world to be less than perfect (free will and original sin). Suffering, disease, and pain are part of this imperfect reality.	God’s permissive vs. perfect will (God allows some bad things to happen. Sometimes we create problems and blame God for them).
“God must be trying to get you to turn back to him.”	God does not inflict pain, suffering, and disease to strong-arm us into conversion!	God weeps with us when we suffer. He has our best interests at heart.
“God must be trying to get your attention.”	God does not send accidents to teach us things, though we can learn from them.	God can bring good out of any broken situation.

**More Good Theology: God is...**

## PART 2. AN INVITATION TO CO-REDEMPTION

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church."

Colossians 1:24

### Our Redemption is Complete

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"The redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished.

Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time he did not bring it to a close."

- John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*

### We Participate in Redemption with Christ

To clarify, the prefix "co" in this sense indicates participation with Christ, not equality to Him.

"[Christ] is the only one who really merits our redemption, [...] but Christ chose to use men and women on this earth who freely unite themselves with Him and offer their work, prayer, and suffering for others."

- Michael Giesler, *How Christ Saves Souls*

## Two Paths of Co-Redemption

### Active

#### Sacrifices we choose:

- Your vocation
- Loved ones
- Voluntary sacrifices
- Fasting, almsgiving

My active path includes...

### Passive

#### Suffering we didn't expect:

- Lack of vocation
- Relationship drama
- Death, illness, trauma
- Accidents, mistakes

My passive path includes...

## Carry Your Cross, Not Your Baggage

### Thought Baggage

- Complaining, blaming and judging
- Bad thoughts that perpetuate problems
- Trying to control others' Locus of Control

### Action / Behavior Baggage

- Unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Bad habits, unhealthy routines, or sins
- Over-indulgence or self-reliance

### My Locus of Control

- My thoughts
- My emotions
- My actions
- My reactions

### Others' Locus of Control

- Their thoughts
- Their emotions
- Their actions
- Their reactions

### Circumstance

Something external happens to us that we don't like (from our active or passive path).

### Thought

The thought you choose in response determines whether you're carrying your cross or baggage.

### Emotion

Emotions are chemical reactions in our bodies, caused by our thoughts.

### Action / Behavior

Our emotions make it easier or harder to choose virtuous actions.

### Example #1: Active Circumstance

I can't go out with my friends because I promised I'd help my husband with chores.

**Baggage Thought**  
I always miss out on fun stuff like this.

**Emotion**  
Annoyed

**Co-Redeeming Thought**  
I show my family I love them by putting them first.

**Emotion**  
Convicted

**Actions / Behaviors**  
Complain about chores, putting them off, moody

### Example #2: Passive Circumstance

All my married friends are going on a couples' date. I'm single and I didn't get invited.

**Baggage Thought**  
Being single is the worst. When will I find someone?

**Emotion**  
Frustrated

**Actions / Behaviors**  
Wallow in self-pity, withdraw from friends

**Co-Redeeming Thought**  
God, I trust you have someone in mind for me.

**Emotion**  
Hopeful

**Action / Behavior**  
Surrender to God, draw closer to him in prayer

### Your Turn!

#### Circumstance

**Baggage Thought**

**Emotion**

**Actions / Behaviors**

**Co-Redeeming Thought**

**Emotion**

**Action / Behavior**

## PART 3. OFFERING UP OUR SUFFERING

### St. Faustina's Three Degrees of Mercy

"You Yourself command me to exercise the three degrees of mercy.

- The first: **the act of mercy**, of whatever kind.
- The second: **the word of mercy** - if I cannot carry out a work of mercy, I will assist by my words.
- The third: **prayer** - if I cannot show mercy by deeds or words, I can always do so by prayer. My prayer reaches out even there where I cannot reach out physically." (St. Faustina's Diary, #163)

#### Act.

**We are the hands and feet of Christ.** If you can do something to alleviate the suffering of others, DO IT.

#### Reconcile.

**We are the heart of Christ.** Seek forgiveness for the suffering you have caused, by action and inaction.

#### Witness.

**We are the face of Christ.** Our moment of suffering is a living, breathing example of Christ on the cross.

#### Worship.

**We become Eucharist.** By offering our suffering at Mass, we too are blessed, broken, and given to others.

# REMINDERS & ENCOURAGEMENT

- God never promises we will be free from suffering. He promises presence: he will be with us in it.
- It's okay to *suffer* when suffering. Lots of people (saints included!) have been angry with God and asked "why?" ...Be honest in your prayer. God will meet you there.
- Suffering will find us no matter what we do- suffering is the vocation of every Christian. We get to choose how we respond (by choosing baggage or co-redemption).
- Persevere with humility: Christ fell 3 times when carrying his cross. Falling and failing aren't a problem for God. It only matters that we get back up.
- No suffering, however small or imperfectly offered, is wasted. God can use all things for his glory.
- The practice of offering up our suffering will not change the world overnight- but we know and we trust it will make a difference. God is using it for good.
- Offer your suffering for a special intention. Or give your intentions to Mary. She knows who is suffering most and will make sure your offering makes an impact (and she'll take care of your loved ones, too).

## IN CONCLUSION

### **God can use even the worst suffering to bring about good.**

This is great joy and consolation of the Catholic faith. Each person is called to participate in "offering up" his or her individual sufferings to God. This suffering, when united with Christ, redeems and sanctifies the sufferer and the whole world.

Those who suffer in great and small ways "become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!"

- John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*

### **Prayer by St. Faustina**

O Most Holy Trinity! As many times as I breathe, as many times as my heart beats, as many times as my blood pulsates through my body, so many thousand times do I want to glorify Your mercy.

I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection, O Lord. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors' souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors' needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness. My true rest is in the service of my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor. I will refuse my heart to no one. I will be sincere even with those who, I know, will abuse my kindness. And I will lock myself up in the most merciful Heart of Jesus. I will bear my own suffering in silence. May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.

O my Jesus, transform me into Yourself, for you can do all things.

(St. Faustina's Diary, #163)