

## 2026 Easter Preaching Series Extra Video on Redemptive Suffering

Welcome to third week of our Easter Small Group Preaching Series. If you didn't know, Deacon Mark has taken on the mantle of the hardest working cleric on campus, edging out Deacon Tom and Fr. Stull over the last few weeks. Deacon Mark has taken over as our maintenance director in the interim between our old director and the new one who will start in the middle of May. So, although Deacon Mark preached this weekend, I am giving him a breather and providing you the extra video for your small group discussions.

This week's topic in our six-week series on cool things about being Catholic is Redemptive Suffering.

How could it possibly be cool? Because God has taken something that seemed so pointless and worthless, something that we have spent the whole history of humanity trying desperately and unsuccessfully to avoid and eliminate, and He has given it meaning and purpose and value. It means that there is no part of our lives that God doesn't care about, including our struggles. He doesn't just see the suffering and shrug His shoulders or tell us "Good luck", He makes it clear that we can unite it to His Son's suffering and then it has a merit and value that can bring good for us or our loved ones or perhaps those we will never meet until Heaven.

But, as Deacon Mark pointed out, it started with God's willingness to suffer with us, particularly on the cross. So, to anyone with suffering, which includes every single one of us, because no matter how blessed we are, we have struggles and suffering at some level, I encourage you to spend time with the Stations of the Cross. Over and over again I have found connections for my sufferings, small or large, in one of the Stations.

Deacon Mark spoke of active and passive suffering, that is, suffering that we freely choose and suffering that seems to choose us. Both can be our reality, and both are possibly of great value.

But you know what my problem is? Well, do you know what one of my problems is? I waste my suffering all the time. I waste it in two primary ways.

First, I waste it as a complainer. My 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher used to say to us, "the only kind of wine I like is the wine I drink." It was her way to get us to stop whining. I need her to say that to me nearly every day, because whenever I encounter sufferings, and usually very minor ones, I have a tendency to whine and complain, wasting the opportunity to offer up the suffering.

Second, I waste it at a stoic. I see my sufferings, again usually very minor, and I feel like I stoically need to ignore them, push them down, act like they don't bother me. That seems noble, and there can be merit in powering through our struggles, but we can persevere AND

offer up at the same time. We can acknowledge that physical or mental difficulties are crosses, and then, offering them up, carry them as Jesus heroically carried His.

So, let me give you a process for offering up your sufferings to make them redemptive. This comes from the late Fr. Steve Sotiroff.

1. Reflect on life events that are troubling you over a period of time (hours, day, days, week, month...).
2. Name the suffering experienced (i.e., what physical/emotional/spiritual pain, disappointment, failure, frustration, loneliness, anxiety, sense of being overwhelmed...). There could be one suffering or a list, a litany of suffering.
3. Acknowledge these suffering(s) to yourself recalling that you are in the presence of God. "God, I know you are present to me. These are the sufferings (name) that I have experienced (over a period of time – day/week/month...)." Yes, you are talking to yourself, but you recognize that God is present.
4. Accept these sufferings in a spirit of prayer. The burden has to be accepted by one's self alone. This is the hardest part. "I accept these sufferings (can be named again.)"
5. Offer to God the sufferings that you have just reflected on, named, and accepted. A person can't offer up to God what they haven't accepted. You can't give what you don't possess. Acceptance is indication of possession, ownership. "Lord I offer to You all these sufferings (can be named again) which I have just accepted. The acceptance and offering up sufferings have now become sacrifices. "Lord these are my sacrifices given to you."

Remember, because Jesus took on our humanity with all of its highs and lows, joys and struggles, every aspect of life now can have value when united to the life of Christ. Every suffering now can have meaning when knowing that Jesus can help to keep it from being empty and wasted. Yet another cool thing about being Catholic and a follower of Jesus.

So, here are our small group discussion questions for this week. Remember, you don't have to get through all of them. They are here merely to help you dive deeper into the topics in your group:

1. What is the difference between passive and active suffering? Are you doing both?
2. In Mass during the offertory, do you join your sufferings with those of Christ on the cross?
3. Have you ever had a time in your life when you used your suffering to aid others?
4. Who is a good example in your life of someone who suffered well?
5. Why do Catholics embrace suffering when the world flees from it?
6. Have you ever experienced a sense of freedom through redemptive suffering?
7. Why do you think Our Lord chose to redeem us through the Passion and Crucifixion?