

## Session K: Morning of the Fifth Day

### Ninth Talk

#### Important Background for the Speaker

The hierarchy of Christian truths requires that this talk's material be last in pedagogical order both for the retreatants and those they minister to. Christians' openness to making this material part of their life, not just of their belief set, presupposes that they have a personal relation to Jesus as Lord and Savior and have a supportive environment of Christian and brothers and sisters.

At first glance, some of the speakers might think that the retreatants are already sufficiently prepared to present and explain this talk's points, since the retreatants had a seminary training similar to those speakers'. But after reading this talk's recommendations for achieving the goals listed below, speakers can judge how far the Church's normal pastoral life today is from adequately presenting and explaining this talk's material.

This is a 40-minute talk.

#### Goals

To ensure that pastors understand that:

- Catholics need, and have a sacred right, to know that living the life of the Trinity gives them the glorious privilege and ability — and thus the responsibility — to share divine life with others.
- Although nonChristians can be saved, the grace that saves them comes from Jesus and so comes through us, Jesus' Body, by our living the life of divinizing grace.
- Sharing divine life with others requires our verbally witnessing to Jesus, even though people can be saved without becoming Christian.
- Offering up our sufferings is one of the most important ways we save souls.
- The purpose of all suffering needs to be better explained than it usually is.

#### Checklist for the Speaker

To achieve these goals, the speaker should ask himself: As a result of my talk, how well will the retreatants appreciate Catholics' need to grasp the following points, and how well the retreatants understand how to present these points?

1. Every Christian has the glorious privilege and purpose in life of helping fellow human beings get to heaven.
2. No one who is offered and refuses the grace to know Jesus is saved. Those not offered the grace to know Jesus can be saved by accepting whatever grace God offers them.

3. Since all grace comes from Jesus, it also comes through us, the communal body that is Jesus continuing to be physically present in the world.
4. The actual graces that save others come to them mainly through our holiness, our living the life of sanctifying grace. Our prayers, sacrifices, sufferings and good works save souls.
5. The silent witness of sanctity is not enough to save others. All Catholics are called to specifically apostolic works. Spreading the faith requires that we sometimes use words.
6. Perfecting the temporal order is the mission of laity *as laity*, but their mission *as Christians*, which is more important, includes announcing Jesus verbally.
7. Not all have the special ministry Scripture calls being an “evangelist,” but all have to be ready to witness to Jesus when God provides the opportunity.
8. Catholics won’t fulfill the call to evangelize if they think that God’s love guarantees that all will be saved.
9. Why evangelize if people can be saved without becoming Catholics? We recommend two answers that have not received enough attention.

First, the grace that saves nonChristians comes through the prayers of the Body of Christ; so we need all the coworkers we can get, and the world needs all the saints we can give it.

Second, witnessing to Jesus lets us suffer *for his name*, an important part of the Church’s life as a visible sacrament of God’s love which comes through Jesus’ suffering.

9. Catholics need to know that suffering is an intrinsic part of our call as Christians. It is a way we can contribute to the salvation of others that is often neglected. Since we are truly members of Christ’s body, our suffering is truly the suffering of Jesus continuing to save the world.
10. Parents, including God, only let their children suffer to avoid greater suffering. The purpose of temporal, finite suffering is to save humankind from eternal, infinite suffering. God has not chosen for us to know the meaning of each suffering but to have faith that all things are for the benefit of his beloved children.
11. God draws good out of all evil, even sin, because he only permits us to carry out our sinful choices if they actually accomplish his plan of redemption, as the sin of killing Jesus accomplished God’s plan.
12. We should preach about our call to suffer only to those who already have a personal relation to Jesus as Savior. But those who do still need to have fellow Christians encourage them in their struggles with suffering.

If any of the points in this checklist are things the speaker does not wish to include in his talk, for the sake of teamwork the speaker should (1) inform the rest of his team of the specific points he does not wish to cover (2) inform the rest of the team what he plans to do instead, and (3) get the consensus of the team for his plan.

If there is a consensus about not covering those points from the checklist, the team can do one of two things instead. (1) They can agree to cover the points in other talks and work out which talks will cover them and how. (2) They can agree not to cover the points at all, since the checklist is not infallible. But before choosing (2) each member of the team should read the paragraphs in the “Explanation of the Outline” and in the Appendix that explain those points and why they were considered pastorally important in the first place.

So checklist points should be deleted from the retreat only if the entire team understands why they were originally considered important from a pastoral point of view, whether or not they are important from any other point of view. The reason why they were included in the first place *may not always be obvious*, especially to alumni of post-Trent seminaries. For example, the reason may concern cultural conditions unique to us but so prevalent that we hardly notice them. (See, for example, the discussion of the phrase “children of God” in Section II.5 of the “Expanded Outline” and the “Explanation of the Outline.”)

Since the team’s discernment of whether to delete a checklist point, and what to cover instead, will take time, a speaker who does not wish to include a checklist point should give the rest of the team ample advance notice.

#### Brief Outline

- I. A fourth reason why the Great News is Great: Every Christian has the glorious privilege of helping fellow human beings get to heaven.
- II. The actual graces that save others come to them mainly through our holiness, through our living the life of sanctifying grace; that life is self-propagating.
- III. The silent witness of sanctity is not enough to save others. All Catholics are called to specifically apostolic works. Spreading the faith requires that we use words.
- IV. Catholics won’t fulfill the call to evangelize if they think that God’s love guarantees that all will be saved.
- V. Suffering is a way Christians contribute to the salvation of others that deserves special attention because of its intrinsic importance and because of the neglect it has received at the pastoral level.
- VI. We close the retreat by emphasizing that divinizing grace not only makes Jesus really present in us but also makes each of us really present in the Son of God.

#### Expanded Outline

- I. The fourth reason why the Great News is Great: Every Christian has the glorious privilege of helping their fellow human beings get to heaven.

- A. All Catholics need to know that they have to glorious privilege of and ABILITY to share divine life with others.
1. Christians are God’s instruments for distributing his grace to others. That grace comes to others through the prayers, sufferings, sacrifices and good works of Christ’s Communal Body.
  2. Catholics need to know that Jesus explicitly says that Christians are the light of the world (Mt 5:14). But we often think those words only describe Jesus.
  3. We do not merit salvation for anyone, including ourselves. Jesus alone was able to do that.
    - a. People can be saved without accepting Jesus or without even hearing his name. But the grace the saves nonChristians comes from Jesus.
    - b. Since that grace comes from Jesus, it also comes through us, the communal body which is Jesus continuing to be physically present in the world.
    - c. Because Jesus has earned divine life for us, we have the joy and privilege of helping him distribute that life to others.
    - d. Our crown of glory will be those we helped get to heaven (I Th 2:19-20; Phil 4:1).
  4. No one is condemned due to our failure to fulfill our mission.
    - a. Anyone condemned deserves it for their own sins. But no one is condemned unless they are offered the grace of salvation and refuse it
    - b. If sinners refuse that grace once, they can still be converted by our continuing to offer them the grace of salvation.
- B. Catholics need to know that they have the glorious purpose in life of saving souls; they need to know that God has given each of us this glorious mission for the sake of our fellow human beings.
1. Catholics already know that their purpose in life is “to know, love, and serve God in this life, and to be happy with him forever in the next.”. But how do we serve God?
  2. Catholics need to know that the purpose of serving God includes the privilege of bringing others divine life.
- C. This mission comes from Baptism and Confirmation, not ordination.

1. The royal priesthood doesn't just assist presbyters' work; presbyters serve the royal priesthood's work.

“While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of baptismal grace in all Christians.” (*The Catechism*, 1547)

2. The descent of the Holy Spirit gave the whole Church the grace for mission.
3. The clergy's job is to get the laity ready for this mission.

II. The actual graces that save others come to them mainly through our holiness, living the life of sanctifying grace; that life is self-propagating.

- A. Every meritorious act of a member of Christ's body contributes to others receiving actual grace. (The speaker should read and hand out and/or display in PowerPoint the following.)

“Let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spread of the Faith is this: to *lead a profoundly Christian life*” (Vatican II, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, 36; emphasis added).

- B. Many people think that to spread the faith they need to do street-corner evangelism or be experts in quoting Scripture.

1. One way to share salvation with others is through ongoing and persistent prayer.

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men . . . This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Tm 2:1-4)

2. At Fatima, Our Lady insisted at each apparition that the children pray, and pray hard, for the conversion of sinners. She taught that souls are lost if we do not pray for them.

We don't have to accept Fatima's private revelation. But it is consistent with 1 Tm 2:1-4 and many other Scripture passages,

3. When St. Paul talks about suffering for the sake of the Church (Col 1:24) he can't mean that we offer our sufferings only for those who are already Christian, but that the Church may achieve its full stature (Eph 4:13).

- C. Saving nonChristians is not the only way Catholics help others get to heaven. They also help those who have already been evangelized achieve sanctity.

1. Since the whole Church is God's witness, our first duty is to the preservation and perfection of divine life in already baptized Christians.
2. St. Paul tells us to pray always but specifically to pray constantly for our fellow Christians:  
  
 "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me...." (Eph. 6:18-19)
3. Catholics can bring back to divine life those who have fallen away from it.
  - a. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)
  - b. "My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his [the sinner's] soul from death." (Jas. 5:19-20)

III. The silent witness of sanctity is not enough to save others. All Catholics are called to works that are specifically apostolic. Spreading the faith requires that we use words.

- A. A special call to perfect the temporal order by gospel values belongs to the laity *as laity*. But *as Christians*, all lay people are called to announce Christ by words.
  1. What pertains to us as Christians is more important than what pertains to us as lay Christians or clerical Christians.
  2. Evangelizing is a good work essential to Christians distributing actual graces to others.
- B. Not all have the special ministry for which Scripture uses the name "evangelist." (Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:8; 2 Tm 4:5).
  1. "His gifts were that *some* should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists...." (Eph. 4:11)
  2. "We entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven." (Acts 21:8)
  3. [Paul to Timothy] "As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Tm 4:5)
- C. The difference between someone with a ministry of evangelizing and an ordinary Christian who evangelizes is like the difference between someone with a ministry of physical healing and ordinary Christians who pray for healing.

1. Some Christians have a ministry of healing in the sense of being someone God regularly uses as a channel through whom the body of Christ's prayers for healing are answered.
2. But all Christians should pray for the healing of others. If those prayers are based on faith and submission to God's will, they will be answered in the way that is best.
3. Likewise, we are not all called to a ministry of regular evangelizing. Still, we should all spread the faith verbally when God provides the occasion.

First Peter (3:15) says be ready to respond when asked about "the hope that is in us."

4. We can all take part in evangelizing by teaching CCD, supporting the missions, etc.

D. Catholics engaging in evangelistic works of any kind need to know that any success we have comes from the sanctity of the whole Church, not our personal abilities.

1. A successful evangelist in mortal sin is just a channel for actual grace that comes through the sanctity of others.
2. When a priest in mortal sin gives absolution, the credit for the actual grace that brought the penitent to confession in the first place goes to good Christians.

E. Works that *directly* evangelize and sanctify others are not the only good works that are necessary for helping others find salvation. Scripture says that people will be saved through observing our good behavior.

1. "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." (I Pt 2:12)
2. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt 5:16)

IV. Catholics won't fulfill the call to evangelize if they think that God's love guarantees that all will be saved.

A. Some Catholics find it hard to believe that a good and loving God would send people to Hell for all eternity.

1. But God can't give us divine life unless he creates us with free will and immortal souls.

2. In giving us free will, God obligates himself to give us the destiny we ultimately choose. He can't give us free will and not give us what we choose.
  3. What persons with immortal souls ultimately choose, they choose to have for eternity. So God is obligated to give it to them for eternity. Not to give it to them for eternity would be contradict the very thing God did in giving them free choice.
- B. Still, pastors must give an adequate answer to the question: If people can be saved without becoming Catholic, why must we evangelize? Why aren't our prayers, sacrifices, suffering and nonevangelistic good works sufficient?
1. This question was not as pressing for pastors before Vatican II. Vatican II's affirmation that nonCatholics can be saved is much more emphatic and prominent than earlier pronouncements.
  2. The Church's clearer stand on salvation outside the Church is welcome, but has the unintended pastoral consequence of requiring us to explain better why Catholics must evangelize.
- C. Different answers have been given for this question. This retreat recommends two important answer that have not received enough attention.
1. Since Christians are God's instruments for the salvation of others, the Church needs all the people it can get to do the praying, sacrificing, suffering and good works that will distribute grace to others.
    - a. Every human being will be offered sufficient grace to be saved. But those who have once refused grace can still be converted through Christians living the Christian life.
    - b. The recognition that Christians are saving souls should not only motivate us in our own Christian lives, but also motivate us to recruit as many co-workers as we can.
 

The world needs as many saints as we can give it.
  2. Evangelizing also allows us to offer up a kind of suffering especially important for the salvation of others, sufferings borne for witnessing to Christ.
    - a. Scripture singles out suffering specifically because we witness to Jesus as a form of suffering that is crucial to God's purposes.
    - b. The importance of that specific kind of suffering is probably due to. the Church's nature as a visible sacrament of God's love within us.

- c. Even unsuccessful evangelizing is part of God’s plan for saving all human kind, particularly if it leads to suffering that Christians offer up for others.
  - E. After Vatican II, we have the problem of teaching how to proclaim the Great News without implying that only those who are visibly Christian can be saved.
    - 1. We suggest that evangelists try to communicate the following.
      - a. What we do in this life has eternal consequences for good or bad.
      - b. For all human beings salvation comes only through the grace of Jesus.
      - c. Those whom God offers the gift of faith in Jesus but who refuse it and persist in refusing it until death cannot be saved; those not offered faith in Jesus can be saved by accepting whatever grace God offers them in whatever way he offers it.
    - 2. These principles say both that not everyone has been offered the grace to know Jesus by name and that everyone gets sufficient grace to be saved.
- V. Suffering is a way Christians contribute to the salvation of others that deserves special attention because of its intrinsic importance and because of the neglect it has received at the pastoral level.
- A. Why does God permit suffering? Christianity is meant to answer that question. Christianity is meant to BE the answer to the problem of suffering.
    - 1. But we say things so vaguely that they sell. short Christianity’s specific answer to the problem of suffering.
 

E.g., we say God is with us in our suffering; God will draw good out of it; God doesn’t cause it, he just permits it.
    - 2. If the normal pastoral life of the Church today handles suffering the way the apostles did, why do so few Christians know that suffering is an intrinsic and important part of what we are called to do as Christians?
 

“If when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. *For to this you have been called*, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.” (1 Pt. 2:20-21)
    - 3. Catholics need and have a solemn right to know that we have been called to suffer. Not telling us this deprives us of a (re)birth right.
      - a. Instead, Catholics often respond to suffering the way any sincere pagan could: “Why me? Why did God let this happen to me?”

- b. But St. Peter says “Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something *strange* were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” (1 Pt 4:12-13)
- B. Why does God permit temporal suffering? For one purpose only: to save us from eternal suffering.
  - 1. We strongly recommend that pastors use the following analogy: Parents don’t permit children to have painful operations except to save children from greater suffering.
  - 2. But God is an all-powerful parent who could prevent suffering. What is the greater good for which he permits events that cause suffering?
  - 3. God has one and only one purpose for *everything* that happens in creation: to save his children from eternal suffering.
    - a. Saving us from eternal suffering is the only created goal God thinks about because it is the only created goal worthy of his thinking about it.
    - b. Add up all the temporal suffering that will ever happen. It does not even compare to the eternal suffering God wants to save us from. The finite cannot compare to the infinite.
    - c. God must know that no other plan would help his children avoid infinite suffering as well as this actual plan, which permits all this temporary suffering.
  - 4. This does not mean that one person’s suffering is all for the salvation of that person. We don’t always see how sufferings help and who they help.
    - a. But Christians need to know that our suffering has the glorious purpose of helping us and others avoid eternal suffering.
    - b. We must pray for all who suffer, especially for suffering Christians whose faith is under attack.
  - 5. How can it be just and loving for God to let innocent children suffer for the salvation of others who are not innocent?
    - a. Christians who live beyond the age of reason have the glorious privilege of offering to God any suffering they had before that age.
    - b. We can only speculate about children who die before that age.
    - c. First Peter says that Jesus gave the spirits of the dead the chance to accept him as Savior (3:19). Why can’t he give the spirits of

children who die the chance to offer up the sufferings they experienced?

- C. Pastors can't be timid about proclaiming the call to suffer. We need each others' mutual support in suffering more than elsewhere.
1. We need to know the meaning of suffering before we undergo severe suffering. We shouldn't have to hear it for the first time while we are suffering.
  2. We can be tempted to feel like hypocrites when we preach the call to suffer. But if we don't hear that message from one another, we won't be prepared for suffering when the time comes.
  3. But overemphasizing suffering can be bad for Christian spirituality.
    - a. It is not wrong to avoid suffering. We should seek physical and mental health and freedom from pain; for we should be physically and mentally able to help others whenever they need us.
    - b. Jesus says to give someone who asks for our coat our shirt too. But what if it's a borrowed shirt? Justice requires that we fulfill our obligations to others. It's the same with suffering.

We can be unjust to those to whom we have obligations if we do not try to avoid physical and mental suffering.
    - c. We should not undertake sacrifices that risk disturbing the peace and joy that God wants us to have and to share with others.
  4. The call to sacrifice is not a call to disdain the good things God gives us to have and to share with others in order for for us all to live fully human lives.
  5. Jesus did not suffer all the time. He did not disdain the enjoyable things of life: food and drink, socializing, relaxing.
- D. To judge how much we should and should not talk about the Christian call to suffer, we suggest using the epistles as a guide.
1. Note that the epistles were for people who had already been personally evangelized and received the Holy Spirit, people who had already

“. . . been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come.” (Heb 6:4-5)
  2. Do not start pre-catechesis with the teaching that Christians are called to suffer.

To accept that call Christians must already appreciate the awesome greatness of the Gift of God, and already have a personal relationship with the Lord and the Spirit.

- E. As with the problem of suffering, Catholics need to know that Christianity is the solution to the problem of evil of all kinds, including moral evil.
1. St. Paul stressed so much that God draws good out of all evil that he was accused of justifying sin (Rm 3:8).

Paul knew that the Creator is so in control of everything, even sin, and that he will draw good out of everything, even sin.
  2. To illustrate how God is in control so that even sin works unto good, we strongly recommend that pastors use the following comparison of two scriptural events:
    - a. The Nazoreans who tried to kill Jesus at the start of his ministry and the Jewish and Roman officials who did kill Jesus at the end of his ministry.
    - b. The fact that the Nazoreans were unsuccessful does not make their attempt any less sinful than the attempt in Jerusalem.
  3. Sin resides in the intention, in the act of will. The intention of killing someone is just as sinful if you fail as if you succeed.
    - a. Both examples were freely willed human sins which God does not control.
    - b. But in one case the carrying out of the sinful intention was successful, in the other unsuccessful. And God has total control over which of our intentions get carried out and which do not.
    - c. I can choose to go to the store, but can only do so if the rest of the universe, starting with my own body, cooperates. God is in complete control over the rest of the universe beyond my will.
    - d. God only permits those sins to be carried out that actually accomplish his plan. And God's plan is for our good.
  4. Jesus' death and resurrection are clear and emphatic proclamations from God that Christianity is the solution to the problem of evil.
    - a. Scripture says the killing of Jesus, the greatest sin, was "according to the set plan and foreknowledge of God" (Ac 2:23), and was what "your (God's) hand and your plan had predestined." (4:28)

- b. By everything we do, we either accomplish God's ultimate purposes willingly, or accomplish them unwillingly. Nothing happens that does not accomplish God's plan.

VI. We close the retreat by emphasizing that divinizing grace not only makes Jesus really present in us but also makes each of us really present in the Son of God.

A. Catholics need a greater appreciation of the fact that they are living in Jesus: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (Jn 14:20; see 1 Jn 4:15-16).

- 1. We are not present in God in just the generic way that all creation is (Acts 17:28), but by really being members of the divine family, participating together in that family's infinite life.
- 2. Catholics need to know that everything about us no longer belongs only to us but truly belongs to Jesus. ("You are Christ's and Christ is God's" 1 Cor 3:23.)

B. Though we can't understand our real presence in Christ completely, we need a much greater appreciation of it than current pastoring gives us if we are to fulfill our mission of making up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

- 1. Our sufferings are no longer just our sufferings but are truly the sufferings of Jesus in us.
- 2. The Redemption did not take away our suffering, but it did join it to Jesus' own suffering, suffering that continues to save souls.

C. We also need a much greater appreciation than current pastoring gives us that our real presence in God unites us with one another in God.

- 1. We are members of one another (Eph. 4:25; Rm. 12, 5).
- 2. So much are we members of one another that "if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12: 26).
- 3. But how conscious are we today that the sufferings of persecuted Christians are our own sufferings?
  - a. How concerned are we for the suffering Christians of Iraq, Pakistan, and so many other places?
  - b. During the cold war, some Jews were scandalized because we were not nearly as concerned about suffering Christians in Russia as they were about suffering Jews.
- 4. How grave is that kind of scandal? As grave as the visible love of Christians for other Christians is important to God's plan for saving the world.

- D. Among the people we need to pray for, we need to pray especially for suffering and persecuted Christians.

### Explanation of the Outline

#### Why These Points Are Important for Pastors To Know and This Retreat To Teach

##### Section I.

Catholics need to know that living the life of the Trinity gives them the glorious privilege and ability—and thus the responsibility—to share divine life with others. And Catholics have a sacred (re)birth right to know that they have this privilege and responsibility.

Catholics need to know why the Great News is great, and this is yet another reason why the Great News is great. Baptism gave us the privilege of helping our fellow human beings get to heaven, and Confirmation gave us the power to fulfill this mission. We are God's instruments for saving others. Jesus offers those who already know that they have divine life the great privilege and mission of helping him distribute that divine life to others. Jesus' saving grace comes to nonChristians through the prayers, sufferings, sacrifices and good works of Christ's communal body.

Catholics need to know that Jesus explicitly says that Christians are the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). But we often think those words only describe Jesus. We do not merit salvation for anyone, including ourselves. Jesus alone was able to do that. But we are channels for bringing the grace he has merited to others.

People can be saved without accepting Jesus and without even hearing his name. They are saved by accepting whatever grace God gives them. But the grace that saves nonChristians comes from Jesus's sacrifice. No one is saved apart from Jesus' meriting salvation for us. Since that grace comes from Jesus, it also comes through us, the communal body which is Jesus continuing to be physically present in the world.

Our crown of glory will be those our sanctity helped get to heaven. The speaker should quote the following passages:

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?. Is it not you?. For you are our glory and joy. (I Th 2:19-20)

Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. (Phil 4:1)

Our failure to fulfill our mission does not cause anyone to be condemned. Anyone condemned earned it by his or her own sins. But no one can be guilty of sin unless they have offered the grace necessary to avoid sin. So no one can be condemned unless they were offered the grace of salvation and refuse it. But if sinners refuse that grace once, they can still be converted by our continuing to offer them the grace of salvation through our prayers, sufferings, sacrifices and good works.

Catholics need to know that in creating them God gave each of them this glorious purpose in life: to save souls. He created each of them to fulfill this great mission for their fellow

human beings. We teach Catholics that the answer to “Why did God make me?” is that he made me to know love and serve him. That is perfectly correct, but pastors need to be more specific about what it means to love and serve him. Catholics need to appreciate the concrete meaning of the service for which God created us and what a privilege it is for their lives to have that meaning. Catholics need to know that our purpose of serving God includes the purpose of bringing others God’s life.

This mission comes from baptism and confirmation, not ordination. The royal priesthood doesn’t just assist presbyters’ work; presbyters serve the royal priesthood’s work. The clergy’s job is to get the laity ready to proclaim the Great News. Clergy can’t go into people’s homes or families or work places or business meetings. The clergy’s job is to equip the royal priesthood with the zeal *they* need for witness.

Concerning the apostolate of the laity, Vatican II says:

All sons of the Church . . . should spend their forces in the work of evangelization. (Vatican II, The Mission Activity of the Church, 36).

The apostolate of the Church and *of all its members* is primarily designed to manifest Christ’s message by words and deeds and to communicate his grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, entrusted in a special way to the clergy, wherein the laity also have their very important roles to fulfill . . . *It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary.*” (Vatican II, Apostolate of the Laity, 6; emphasis added)

The Catechism states:

While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of baptismal grace in all Christians. (1547)

## Section II.

The actual graces that save others come through our holiness, our living the life of sanctifying grace; that life is self-propagating. Every meritorious act of a member of Christ’s body contributes to others receiving actual grace.(The speaker should read and hand out and/or display in PowerPoint the following:)

“Let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spread of the faith is this: to *lead a profoundly Christian life*” (Vatican II, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, 36, emphasis added).

Many people think that, to evangelize, they need to do street-corner evangelism or be experts in quoting Scripture verses. They avoid “evangelizing” because they’re afraid or don’t feel they are capable of it. One way to share salvation with others is through ongoing and persistent prayer. (The speaker should read and hand out and/or display in PowerPoint the following:)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (1 Tm 2:1-4)

St. Paul wouldn't have asked Christians to pray for all human being if he didn't know their prayers would be fruitful in saving others.

At Fatima, Our Lady insisted at each apparition that the children pray, and pray hard, for the conversion of sinners. She taught that souls are lost if we do not pray for them. We do not have to accept such private revelation. But Fatima's teaching is consistent with 1 Tm 2:1-4 and many other Scripture passages, for example, the places where St. Paul asks for prayers for his ministry.

And when St. Paul says that we make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of Christ's body, the Church (Col 1:24), he can't mean that this is just for the sake of those who have already become members of Christ's body but not those who will become members later. "For the sake of Christ's body" must mean in order that the body may achieve its full stature, both spiritually and numerically. And the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* says that all those in the state of grace are members of the body, even if they are not visibly Christian. So in suffering for the sake of Christ's body, St. Paul is suffering that all human beings may be saved.

Saving nonChristians is not the only way Catholics help others get to heaven. The Christian's vocation of helping others find eternal salvation includes helping already baptized Christians; for our apostolate includes not only evangelization but also the sanctification of the already evangelized (see *Apostolate of the Laity*, 2 and 6).

In fact, in an important sense, our primary obligation is to the preservation and perfection of the life of divinizing grace in Christians. This is simply making another application of the principle, "Do good to all men--but especially to those of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). As we said in the sixth talk, on the morning of the fourth day, we do not love Christians instead of loving nonChristians; we love them for the sake of the salvation of nonChristians. The Church is God's instrument for saving all who are saved. In praying for brother and sister Christians, we are supporting God's instruments for saving everyone not yet in the Church.

St. Paul specifically tells us to pray constantly for our fellow Christians:

Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me.... (Eph 6:18-19)

Our prayers, works and sacrifices can result in the gift of God being restored to Christians who have lost it and preserved and increased in those who have not.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted (Ga 6:1).

My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his (the sinner's) soul from death (Jm 5:19-20).

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 (Col 1:24).

### Section III.

Still, the silent witness of sanctity is not enough. All Catholics are called to specifically apostolic works. Spreading the faith requires that we use words.

We often hear that the job of the laity is the perfection of the temporal order according to Christian values, as if the laity were not called explicitly bring people to Christ. That is incorrect. A special call to perfect the temporal order by Christian values belongs to the laity *as laity*. But *as Christians*, all lay people are called to announce Christ by words.

Vatican II makes a distinction between the laity's vocation of perfecting the temporal order with Christian values, on the one hand, and their vocation of evangelization and the sanctification of the already evangelized, on the other:

They (the laity) exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men *and* to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel. (Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2; emphasis added).

What pertains to all Christians as Christians is more important than what pertains to them as lay Christians or clerical Christians. All Christians are called to explicitly witness to the Lord through words. Verbal witness is one of the good works included in our call to serve the Lord and our fellow human beings through good works. Our other good works also distribute grace, but they are not sufficient by themselves.

But not all Christians have the special ministry for which Scripture uses the name "evangelist" The speaker should read at least the first two of the following quotes:

His gifts were that *some* should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. (Eph. 4:11)

We entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven. (Acts 21:8)

[Paul to Timothy]. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (1 Tm 4:5)

We can see the difference between an ordinary Christian who evangelizes and someone with the ministry of evangelizing by comparison with the ministry of healing. We probably all know of Christians, including recent Christians, whom God often used for powerful healings. Venerable Solanus Casey of Detroit seemed to have had a valid healing ministry, as did Fr. Robert McDonough of Boston. We wouldn't say that all Christians have a ministry of healing in

this sense of being someone God regularly uses as a channel through whom the body of Christ's prayers for healing are answered.

But you don't need to have that kind of healing ministry to pray for the physical healing of others. All Christians can and should pray for the physical healing of others. And if those prayers are based on faith and submission to God's will, we must believe that they are answered in the way that God knows is the best for the person we are praying for. (God never answers prayers based on faith and repentance by just saying "No." He answers with the best "Yes" possible, but only he knows what the best possible outcome is.)

It's the same with evangelizing. On the one hand, the fact that we are not all called to have a regular ministry of evangelizing does not mean that shouldn't spread the faith verbally when God provides the occasion. First Peter (3:15) says be ready to respond when asked about "the hope we have in us." But on the other hand, the fact that all of us are called to spread the faith when God provides the occasion does not mean that we are all called to a regular ministry of evangelizing.

As Vatican II (*Apostolate of the Laity*, 6) says, all Catholics should be alert for the opportunities to evangelize that God will provide in the course of one's ordinary life. But not all Catholics need to so reorganize their ordinary lives that significant parts of them are routinely dedicated primarily to evangelizing. Also, all Catholics participate in evangelization and sanctification directly when they support the missions and Catholic media, when they teach CCD, etc.

Catholics engaging in evangelistic works of any kind need to know that any success they have comes from the sanctity of the whole Church, not through their personal efforts. A successful evangelist in mortal sin can be a channel for grace, but that grace comes through the sanctity of others who are in the state of grace.

Likewise, a priest in mortal sin can give absolution validly, but he is acting as a channel for actual graces coming from good Christians. Why did the penitent who receives absolution come to confession in the first place? Because he was yielding to actual graces that came to him through the sanctity of Christians who, unlike that priest, are in the state of grace.

Works that directly evangelize are not the only good works that are necessary for helping others find salvation. Scripture says that people will be saved through observing our good behavior.

Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (I Pt 2:12)

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16)

#### Section IV.

Catholics won't fulfill the call to evangelize if they think that God's love guarantees that all will be saved. The reason we have to engage in apostolic works is that people's eternal destinies are at stake. Catholics won't be sufficiently motivated to evangelize if they don't know

that. But some Catholics find it hard to believe that a good and loving God would send people to Hell for all eternity. They ask, if God knows that a person he created will go to Hell, why would he create that person in the first place, or why would he allow their punishment to go on permanently?

God can't give us divine life, however, unless he creates us with free will and immortal souls. In giving us free will, God obligates himself to give us the destiny we ultimately choose. He can't give us free will and not give us what we choose. That would be contradictory for God to do, because it would rob the gift of free will of its intrinsic meaning.

Also, what persons with immortal souls ultimately choose, they choose to have for eternity. So God is obligated to give it to them for eternity. Not to give it to them for eternity would be contradict the very thing God did in giving us free choice, which requires that we have immortal souls.

The answer to another problem about a loving God and eternal suffering is the same: Once those with free choice make a final choice of evil, wouldn't it be more compassionate for God just to let them go out of existence? But they *want* to remain in existence apart from God. And because they want that as a result of freely choosing it, the same God who gave them free choice has to give it to them. Not giving them what they want would contradict the meaning of what he did when he gave them free choice and immortal souls.

Still, pastors must be prepared to give an adequate answer to the following question: If people can be saved without becoming Catholic, why must Catholics evangelize? Why shouldn't our prayers, sacrifices, suffering and nonevangelistic good works be sufficient to bring them the grace they need?

This question has become pastorally urgent since Vatican II. Prior to Vatican II, the Church taught that nonCatholics could be saved but did not do so prominently unless it was challenged to do so by people like Fr. Feeney. The new emphasis Vatican II gave, as welcome as it was, was a pastoral change that had unforeseen pastoral consequences, as other pastoral changes have had in the past.

It was not foreseen that raising Catholics' consciousness that non Catholics could be saved would create a new obstacle to motivating Catholics to evangelize. When someone's being saved *de facto* meant, in the ordinary thinking of Catholics, that he or she had to become Catholic, there is a clear reason why evangelization is necessary. (Which is not to say that Catholics did much evangelizing. They didn't, and the Church did not encourage them to. Now that the Church is urging Catholics to evangelize, it is in the awkward position of also telling them that people do not have to be Catholic to be saved.)

This is an unforeseen obstacle to Catholics' enthusiasm for evangelizing. The Church's clearer stand on salvation outside the Church is welcome, but few have noticed that it requires us to explain better why Catholics need evangelize. Different answers have been given for this question. This retreat wants to recommend two important answers that have not received enough attention.

First, the fact that nonChristians can be saved does not mean that their salvation does not depend on our help. It does. They are saved by responding to whatever grace God gives them. But since that grace comes from Jesus and only from Jesus, every grace by which nonChristians

are saved comes to them through the prayers, works and sufferings of Christians, the people in whom Jesus continues to live, teach and work in the world.

Since Christians are God's channels for the salvation of others, the Church needs all the people it can get to do the praying, sacrificing, suffering and good works that will distribute grace to others. The recognition that Christians are saving souls by living the life of grace should not only motivate us in our private Christian lives, but also motivate us to recruit as many co-workers as we can. Catholics need to know that when their evangelizing brings someone to Christ, it is not only that person's soul that is being saved. Also being saved are all the people who will be saved through that person. The world needs as many saints as the Church can give it.

Second, Catholics need to evangelize because evangelizing allows royal priests to offer up a kind of suffering especially important for the salvation of others, sufferings borne for witnessing explicitly to the name of Jesus Christ. Scripture often singles out suffering specifically because we witness to Jesus as a form of suffering that is important for God's purposes.

The importance of suffering specifically for witnessing to Christ is probably due to the Church's nature as a visible sacrament of God's love really present in us. The importance of that kind of suffering also means that even evangelizing that is visibly unsuccessful is part of God's plan for saving nonChristians, since unsuccessful evangelizing allows us to offer up sufferings borne for the name of Jesus Christ.

Another unintended consequence of our clearer affirmation that nonChristians can be saved concerns the way we express the Great News that salvation is available to all human beings but only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The ways that is often expressed could give a nonChristian the idea that people who have never heard of Jesus, and, never will, cannot be saved. heard. How do evangelists express the Great News without implying that only those who are visibly Christian can be saved?

We suggest that evangelists try to communicate the following:

1. What we do in this life has eternal consequences for good or bad.
2. For all human beings salvation comes only through the grace of Jesus.
3. Those to whom God offers the gift of faith in Jesus but who refuse it and persist in refusing it until death cannot be saved; those not offered faith in Jesus can be saved by accepting whatever grace God offers them in whatever way he offers it.

These principles say both that not all have been offered the grace to know Jesus by name and that Jesus gives everyone sufficient grace to be saved.

The fact that nonChristians can be saved, therefore, should never be an excuse for Christians neglecting to tell others that this life is a test for eternity and that they need Jesus to get to heaven. God has given Christians the sacred and salvific mission to ensure that as many human beings as possible know that. If we do not share that, some people that God is wants to become Christians and carry on Christ's work for the salvation of all will never hear God's call.

## Section V.

The second reason for evangelizing just given, the opportunity to suffer for Jesus, brings up another issue that receives much too little attention in the normal pastoral life of the Church, suffering in general.

Suffering, whether or not borne for being Christian, is a way Christians contribute to the salvation of others that deserves special attention because of its intrinsic importance and because of its frequent neglect at the pastoral level. Suffering is so important to our mission of sharing eternal life with others that Catholics need to have the place of suffering in God's plan for them much better explained than it usually is. To enhance our willingness to bear our sufferings for the sake of others, this section will attempt to supply some things that explanations of suffering often leave out.

Our mission of saving others is done a disservice by the timidity with which much contemporary rhetoric approaches God's permission of evil in general and suffering in particular. It is true that God permits evil rather than directly willing it. Evil occurs as a side-effect, a by-product of something else that God does directly will (as when we directly choose to strip off a bandage without directly willing the accompanying sting, even though we know the sting will occur.) But just saying that does not express how mightily God draws good out of created events that have evil and suffering connected with them.

Why does God permit so much suffering? Christianity is meant to answer that question. We are going to be judged primarily on how we deal with difficulty, suffering in the broad sense, not on how we handle contentment. In general, the motivation for sin is the cessation or prevention of some perceived suffering, for example, the cessation of the discomfort of fighting a temptation or the prevention of the perceived future suffering of not having, say, enough money, enough pleasure, enough alcohol to drink, or enough power. We will be judged on whether we handle suffering and its prospect in moral ways or immoral ways. So Christianity is meant to *be* the answer to the problem of suffering

But some things we hear Christians say are so vague that they sell Christianity's specific answer to the problem of suffering short. E.g., people say God is with us in our suffering, that God will draw good out of it, that God doesn't cause it but just permits it, as if he was powerless to stop it.

In fact, Christians are *called* to suffer (the speaker should quote and hand out or display in PowerPoint):

If when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. *For to this you have been called*, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps (1 Pt. 2:20-21).

But how many Christians know that suffering is an intrinsic and important part of what we are called to as Christians? Catholics need and have a solemn right to know that we have been called to suffer. Not telling them this deprives them of a (re)birth right.

First Peter also says (the speaker should quote and hand out or display in PowerPoint):

Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something *strange* were happening to you. (4:12)

Still, don't we often hear practicing Catholics say "Why me? Why did God let this happen to me?" They are *surprised* by suffering and find it *strange* even though they participate in the normal pastoral life of the Church. Don't pagans react to suffering the same way? 1st Peter goes on:

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (4:13)

Note that not all suffering is evil. It is good for a baby that her hand hurts when it touches a hot stove; she won't touch that stove again. Pain is an excellent warning system; where would we be without it? So most parents would not want to shelter their children from the mild and transient kinds of suffering normally experienced during play and athletics; they do not want their children to grow up "sissies," afraid of mild pain.

But why does God permit so much temporal suffering, far beyond anything we need for the sake of living safely and healthily. He permits so much temporal suffering for one purpose only: to save us from eternal suffering. In fact, saving us from eternal suffering is the only purpose for everything that happens in creation. That is the only created goal God thinks about. "For our eternal salvation" is the answer to every question about what God does or permits; so it is also the answer to the question of why he permits so much suffering.

We strongly recommend that pastors think through the following analogy: God is our loving parent. Parents don't allow children to have painful operations except to save children from greater suffering. Parents do it only as a last resort. If an extremely painful operation is necessary for a child to live, loving parents will permit the suffering for the sake of saving the child's life — but only because the parents do not have the power to save the child's life any other way. The parents do not directly will the pain, but permit it as unavoidably connected with the only way to accomplish a goal sufficiently great that it is worth the price of the pain. If the parents had the power to solve the child's problem in a way that did not require the suffering, the parents would certainly use that other way rather than permit the suffering.

But God is an all powerful parent who could prevent suffering. Why is almighty God like the human parents who permit their child to suffer because they have no other way to accomplish the goal for which they permit the suffering? What goal could be so great as to justify God's not preventing the suffering that, all other things being equal, he could prevent?

God has one and only one purpose for *everything* that happens in creation: to save his children from eternal suffering. Saving us from eternal suffering is the only created goal God thinks about because it is the only created goal worthy of his thinking about (unless somewhere in the universe there are other created persons who are at risk of eternal damnation). Add up all the temporal suffering that will ever happen: It does not even compare to the eternal suffering God wants to save us from. The finite cannot compare to the infinite.

How important is our salvation to God? To be most accurate theologically, our salvation is so important that God allowed his Son to become sin for our sake. (2 Co 5:21) But there is another truth about the importance of our salvation to God that we all should know because of its

pastoral significance: Our salvation is so important that God permits his beloved children to undergo all the suffering that occurs on earth.

God must know that no other plan would be as effective in saving us from infinite suffering as his actual plan that permits all this finite suffering. Every temporal suffering God permits must contribute to saving human beings from eternal suffering. So not only is God perfectly *just* in permitting all the suffering he does, but God would not be perfectly *loving* if he did not permit it.

When 1st Peter tells us that we do not get any credit for suffering for wrongdoing (1 Pt 2:20; 4:15), it is in effect saying that such sufferings do not “complete what is lacking in Christ’s sufferings” (Col 1:24). Jesus’ sufferings were not undergone because of any wrongdoing on his part. But 1st Peter is not saying that those sufferings do not occur as a result of God’s plan for our salvation. All things do. First Peter is talking about wrongdoers as wrongdoers; it is saying that suffering does wrongdoers no good to the extent that they do not repent of being wrongdoers. Suffering undergone for wrongdoing, however, can lead to a wrongdoers’ repentance. If it does not, the suffering is still part of the wrongdoer’s just punishment. But if wrongdoers do repent, as the good thief did, their suffering can complete what is lacking in Christ’s, since they can offer it up for others.

The existence of so much suffering is another refutation of the view, so inimical to evangelization, that there can be no eternal damnation. Unless this vale of tears is a test that has eternal consequences, it makes no sense whatsoever. If our failure to cope with temporary suffering in a moral way will lead only to the further temporary suffering of purgatory, little is at stake in the decisions we have to make in the midst of all this current suffering. For even if the finite sufferings of purgatory are greater than the finite sufferings we try to avoid by sinning, both kinds of suffering fall infinitely short of the eternal happiness everyone would eventually be guaranteed in heaven. For all practical purposes, the punishment for sin would amount to nothing in comparison with the destiny we were all going to enjoy anyway. So why should God go to the trouble of permitting all this current suffering, if the way we handle it will not make a difference that really matters in the long run (the *very* long run)?

It is not fashionable to focus on eternal suffering in today’s pastoring. There is a good reason for that. For those who already have a relation to Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, fear of punishment should not be the main motivator pastoring relies on to promote Christian behavior. Paul’s method, which we discussed in the second talk, of motivating Christians by the glory of God’s inexpressible gift shows that. But there is a reason other than fear for Christians to be reminded that the possibility of eternal suffering faces all human beings. Christians need to know why God is justified in allowing us to experience finite sufferings, not matter how great; they need to know that everything, whether willed by God directly or merely permitted, is part of his plan to save us from infinite suffering.

This does not mean that one person’s suffering is all for the salvation of that person. Our offering up of sufferings for the salvation of others shows that. We don’t always see how our sufferings help and whom they help. All we need to know is that everything including suffering happens to accomplish God’s plan of saving everyone, if we will only let him. We must pray for all who suffer, especially for suffering Christians whose faith is under attack.

But this still leaves a question Catholics deserve to have answered: How can it be just and loving for God to let innocent children with no choice in the matter suffer for the salvation

of others who are not innocent? Christians who live beyond the age of reason have the conscious opportunity to offer up any suffering they experienced before reaching that age. Those who are Christians by baptism of desire may not do this consciously. But at the judgment they will rejoice to see how God used their suffering, and will be able to rejoice because a uniting of their sufferings to Jesus' sufferings was implicit in their baptism of desire.<sup>1</sup>

What about the suffering, however, of innocent children, baptized and unbaptized, who die before the age of reason? We must be ready to give an honest answer to this question. Apparently, God has chosen not to reveal the destiny of unbaptized children who die before the age of reason. So God is asking us to have faith that their destinies are compatible with his infinitely perfect love for them, a love that desires only their eternal good. We can and will speculate, however, about the suffering of both baptized and unbaptized children. But first we must recognize that any speculation not based on faith in God's perfectly loving plan for every human being would not only be idle speculation, but also *idol* speculation, speculation based on a false idea of God.

1st Peter says that Jesus preached the Great News to the "spirits," (3:19) of the dead. Jesus was giving spirits separated from their bodies the opportunity to accept the Great News. He can do the same for the spirits of children who die young, perhaps even while their spirits are still in their bodies. Either in or out of the body, those children's souls could have the opportunity to freely, if only implicitly, unite the sufferings they have experienced to Jesus' sufferings.

The souls of all human beings are present in their bodies from the moment of conception, just as Jesus's soul was. This was not known at Aquinas' time, but the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confirms it. Mary could not have been conceived in divinizing grace, which resides in us because it resides in our souls, unless her human soul was present at conception. The presence of the soul means that those faculties, vegetative, sensible and rational, that it possesses by necessity are also present. Normally, the actual functioning of the faculties of intellect and will presupposes a certain amount of bodily development. But since intellect and will are not intrinsically physical faculties, at the moment of death God could allow a child's intellect and will to act without the body's normal development.

There are some things, however, for which believers do not have to supplement faith with speculation. At the final judgment, we will praise God for his glorious plan, which permitted so much suffering. We will praise him for permitting both our own suffering and the suffering of others, the suffering of both those who died before being able to freely offer it up and the suffering of those who lived past that age. We will see not only how just God was in permitting that suffering; we will see how worthy of praise and gratitude he is for permitting it. And pastors can't be timid about saying that.

Nor can pastors be timid about proclaiming the call to suffer. We need each others' mutual support here more than anywhere else. And we need to learn the meaning of suffering before we undergo severe suffering. Normally, persons in great pain shouldn't have to be hearing about our call to suffer for the first time. They need to have been sufficiently clear about our call to suffer that it does not come as a surprise when they experience it.

Knowing that they don't handle suffering better than anyone else does, pastors can be tempted to feel like hypocrites when they preach the call to suffer. We must resist that

temptation. If Christians don't hear the meaning of suffering from one another, they won't be prepared for it when the time comes.

Overemphasizing suffering, however, can be bad for Christian spirituality. For Christians to accept God's plan for suffering, they also need to know why the call to offer up sufferings does not make it wrong to avoid suffering. When we have a headache, for example, there is no contradiction between taking an aspirin and offering up the suffering God allows us to have before the aspirin takes effect.

We do not seek suffering for its own sake. In fact, it would often be wrong if we didn't try to avoid suffering. We should seek physical and mental health and freedom from pain; otherwise we could not do sufficiently well the ordinary things that Jesus intends for us to do. Nor could we fulfill our responsibilities to others. We should be physically and mentally able to help others whenever they need us, which can be at any moment. A simple headache can diminish our ability to function as others depend on us to function. And by making us irritable and weak, pain can interfere with our ability to conduct our personal relationships the way our Christian obligations require, including conducting them in a peaceful and joyful Christian spirit.

Along the same lines, Jesus says if someone asks for your coat, give them your shirt too. But what if we borrowed the shirt? Justice requires that we fulfill our obligations to others; so it would be wrong to voluntarily give away the shirt. It's the same with suffering. We are being unjust to those to whom we have responsibilities if we do not try to avoid physical and mental suffering.

Christians normally should not undertake penances that risk disturbing the peace and joy that God wants them to have and to share with others. When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites" (Mt. 6:16). This passage refers to looking dismal deliberately. But neither should we sacrifice so much that we cannot keep ourselves from projecting discomfort. If we lose our peace and joy in doing a voluntary penance, that is a good sign that we are probably trying to do it by our power instead of by God's grace.

God made us social beings because he wants us to share our lives with each other. We share our lives with each other by sharing good things with each other. To share good things with each other, we must have good things to share. The call to sacrifice is not a call to disdain the good things God gives us to have and to share with others in order for them and for us to live fully human lives. When we sacrifice things of this world, we do it out of love, not because those things are bad. They are good and meant by God for our grateful use and enjoyment.

Jesus did not suffer all the time. He did not disdain the enjoyable things of life: food and drink, socializing, relaxing. Unlike John the Baptist, he drank alcohol and ate normal food; he could have dressed in camel's hair like John, but chose not to. He went to weddings and banquets; he rested; he shared relaxation with the disciples and told them to rest; he enjoyed the company of close friends; he avoided dangers; he asked for drinks of water; he even enjoyed food and drink after his resurrection, when he wouldn't have needed them.

A responsibility we have to others that we often do not think of is the responsibility to allow them to help us, since that is essential to their purpose in life and their sense of self-worth. St. Paul thanked the Philippians for helping him, not because he needed it, but because it redounded to their credit (Phil 4:17). One of the most important ways in which God gives others

the privilege of helping us is by relieving our sufferings. In normal circumstances, we should not deprive them of that privilege by choosing to suffer.

As to how much we should and should not talk about the Christian call to suffer, we suggest using the epistles as a guide. But remember that the epistles were for people who have already been personally evangelized and received the Holy Spirit, people who have already

. . . been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. (Heb 6:4-5)

Do not start pre-catechesis with the teaching that Christians are called to suffer. To accept that call Christians must already appreciate the awesome greatness of the Gift of God, and already have a personal relation to the Lord and the Spirit.

Along with the problem of temporal suffering, it is crucial that Christians understand how God is so in control of everything, including the most horrendous sinful acts, that nothing happens unless he permits it for a greater good. St. Paul stressed that God draws good out of evil to the point that people accused him of saying that it is alright to sin Rm (3:8). How likely would it be for a contemporary preacher to be accused of that for emphasizing as much as Paul did that God draws good out of evil?

As a clear way of explaining how God is so in control of everything that even sin works unto good, we strongly recommend that pastors use a comparison of the following two scriptural examples: The example of the Nazoreans who tried to kill Jesus at the start of his ministry and the example of the Jewish and Roman officials who succeeded in killing Jesus at the end of his ministry.

The fact that the attempt in Nazareth was unsuccessful does not make it any less sinful than the attempt in Jerusalem. Sin resides in the intention, in the act of will. The choice to kill someone is just as sinful if you fail to kill them as if you succeed. So Jesus' actual executioners in Jerusalem were no more sinful than his would-be executioners in Nazareth. Both choices were freely willed human sins, which God does not cause.

But the carrying out of one sinful choice was successful, the carrying out of the other was unsuccessful. God has total control over which of our choices get carried out and which do not. You can choose to go to the store; that choice is in your control. But in order for you to succeed in going to the store, the rest of the universe, starting with your own body, has to cooperate. As soon as you make that choice, you could have a heart attack, or the store might burn down, or whatever.

You are not in control of whether you succeed in carrying out a choice because you are not in control of the rest of the universe, not even of your ability to take your next breath. But God is in complete control of the rest of the universe. So he is in complete control of whether your choices, including your sinful choices, get successfully carried out.

In Jerusalem God permitted a sinful choice to succeed; in Nazareth, he did not permit a sinful choice to succeed. Why? God only permits those sins to be carried out that actually result

in the fulfillment his plan. And God's plan is for our good. God prevented one sinful choice from being successfully carried out because Jesus's dying in that way at that time and place would not accomplish his plan for our salvation. God permitted another sinful choice to be successfully carried out, but only because Jesus' dying in that way at that time and place would accomplish God's plan for achieving the greatest good, our salvation.

That is why Scripture says that the killing of Jesus, the greatest sin ever, was "according to the set plan and foreknowledge of God" (Ac 2:23), and was what "your (God's) hand and your plan had predestined." (4:28) In fact, nothing can happen that is not according to the set plan and foreknowledge of God; no choice gets carried out unless God's plan has predestined it to be carried out. Sinful choices are not predestined, but they can't interfere with God's plan.

Even the demons did not know that their plan to have men crucify Jesus would fulfill God's plan for bringing about their ultimate defeat (1 Cor 2:7-8; Eph 3:18, 2:2, 6:12). (Since they are defeated, why do we still have to fight them? Because in giving us the privilege of helping each other get to heaven, Jesus is letting us share in his victory over them.)

The principle illustrated by the different outcomes of the sin of Nazareth and the sin of Golgatha is at work in every event that God has ever created and ever will create. The tiniest detail of the tiniest event accomplishes the consciously willed plan of God, no matter how much suffering and evil that are not directly willed may be connected with it.

There are only two things creatures can do, accomplish God's ultimate purposes willingly, or accomplish them unwillingly. Out of all my sinful choices, for which I alone am responsible, the only ones that get carried out are those that will in fact accomplish God's predestined plan. That is how God draws good out of moral evil, even the greatest possible moral evil, without being responsible for moral evil. The death and resurrection of Jesus are clear and emphatic proclamations from God that Christianity is the solution to the problem of evil.

All Christians need and deserve to know how God draws good out of moral evil without being responsible for moral evil. In other words, they deserve to know that God indeed is God. (See Ps 46:11).

## Section VI.

This retreat began its pastoral advice by emphasizing the importance of divinizing grace as the real presence of Jesus in each of us. We complete our pastoral advice by emphasizing that divinizing grace makes each of us really present in the Son of God.

Catholics need a greater appreciation of the fact that they are living in Jesus: "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (Jn 14:20; 1 Jn 4:15-16). Our knowledge that those who are not visible members of the Church can be saved has not only discouraged evangelization; it has also diminished our appreciation of the importance of the *spiritual* union of all Christ's disciples. The sixth and seventh talks, on the morning and afternoon of the fourth day, stressed the visible aspects of the New Law against the idea that Christian unity is "spiritual" in the sense of only being an invisible unity. But in their most important meaning, the spiritual aspects of Jesus's New Law and prayer for unity are likewise underappreciated today. Divinizing grace is the real presence of the Trinity in each of us. But equally important is the fact that divinizing grace makes us really present *in God* (1 Jn 4:15-16), not just in the generic way in which all creation exists in

God (Acts 17:28), but by really being members of the divine family and participating together in that family's infinite life.

We become present in God by being united with Jesus's humanity in his communal body, the Church. Membership in Jesus's body does not just unite us with his sacred humanity; it makes us truly dwell in God as participants in God's own life, the life of a family eternally rejoicing in each other's infinite glory. In particular, it makes us dwell in the Second Person of the Trinity (1 Cor 12:12; Eph 1:23; Jn 14:20).

Catholics need to know that everything about us no longer belongs only to us but truly belongs to Jesus:

All things are yours, . . . and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's. (1 Cor 3:21, 23)

We can't understand our real presence in Christ completely. But if we are to fulfill our mission of making up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, we need a much better appreciation of our presence in Christ than we now have. Since everything about us no longer belongs only to us but truly belongs to Jesus, our sufferings no longer belong just to us but truly are the sufferings of Jesus in us continuing to save souls. The redemption did not take away our suffering, but it did join it to Jesus' own suffering, the suffering that still brings the Gift of God to, and helps to perfect it in, our fellow human beings.

We also need a much greater appreciation than current pastoring gives us that our real presence in God unites us with one another in God. "We are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25; Rm. 12, 5); so much so that ".If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12: 26).

But how often are we reminded — or even informed for the first time — that the sufferings of persecuted Christians are our own sufferings, since they are Christ's sufferings and our dwelling in Christ makes us members of each other? When was the last time we took a serious concern for the Christians who are either fleeing their homes or being murdered because of the name of Christ? During the cold war, some Jews were scandalized since we were not nearly as concerned about suffering Christians in Russia as they were about suffering Jews.

How grave is that kind of scandal? It strikes at the very heart of Jesus' plan for bringing the world to salvation: the visible loving unity of Christians with their fellow Christians.

Among the people we need to pray for, we need to pray especially for suffering and persecuted Christians.

### Usable Quotes

#### Our Glorious Privilege of Helping Fellow Human Beings Get to Heaven:

1. You are the light of the world (Mt 5:14)

2. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?. Is it not you?. For you are our glory and joy. (1 Th 2:19-20)
3. Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. (Phil 4:1)
4. First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men . . . . This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (1 Tm 2:1-4).
5. 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 (Col 1:24).

We Also Help Those Who Have Already Been Evangelized Achieve Sanctity:

6. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me.... (Eph 6:18-19)
7. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)
8. My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his [the sinner's] soul from death. (Jas. 5:19-20)

Not All Have The Special Ministry for Which Scripture Uses the Name "Evangelist":

9. His gifts were that *some* should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists.... (Eph. 4:11)
10. [Paul to Timothy] As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tm 4:5)
11. We entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven. (Acts 21:8)
12. 1st Peter (3:15) says be ready to respond when asked about "the hope that is in us."
13. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pt 2:12)
14. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16)
15. . . . those who have been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. (Heb 6:4-5)

### God Draws Good out of Sin and Suffering

16. If when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. *For to this you have been called*, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. (1 Pt. 2:20-21)
17. Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something *strange* were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Pt 4:12-13)
18. For Christ also died for since once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous . . . being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey. (1 Pt:3:18-19).
19. And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. (Rm 3:8).
20. The killing of Jesus, the greatest sin, was “according to the set plan and foreknowledge of God” (Ac 2:23), and was what “your (God's) hand and your plan had predestined.” (4:28)
21. We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age (see Eph 6:12) understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor 2:7-8)
22. . . . the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (Eph 3:9-10; and see 2:2; 6:12)

### Catholics need a greater appreciation of the fact that they are living in Jesus

22. I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (Jn 14:20; see 1 Jn 4:15-16).
23. He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (1 Cor 12:12)
24. . . . the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)
25. All things are yours, . . . and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's. (1 Co 3:21, 23)
27. We are members of one another. (Eph. 4:25; Rm. 12, 5).
28. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor. 12: 26)

29. Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit increasing to your account. (Phil 4:17; literal translation)

### The Apostolate of the Laity

30. Let everyone know that their first and most important obligation for the spread of the Faith is this: to *lead a profoundly Christian life*. (Vatican II, *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, 36; emphasis added).
31. All sons of the Church . . . should spend their forces in the work of evangelization. (Vatican II, The Mission Activity of the Church, 36).
32. The apostolate of the Church and *of all its members* is primarily designed to manifest Christ's message by words and deeds and to communicate his grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, entrusted in a special way to the clergy, wherein the laity also have their very important roles to fulfill . . . *It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary*..(Vatican II, Apostolate of the Laity, 6; emphasis added)
33. While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of baptismal grace in all Christians. (*The Catechism*, 1547)

### NonChristians are not the only ones Catholics help get to heaven

34. They (the laity) exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and *sanctification* of men.(Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2, and see 6; emphasis added)
35. They (the laity) exercise the apostolate in fact by their activity directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men *and* to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel.. (Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 2; emphasis added).
36. All Catholics should be alert for the opportunities to evangelize that God will provide in the course of one's ordinary life. (Vatican II, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 6)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>. See Jacques Maritain, “The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom,” in *The Range of Reason*.