

EXPERIENCE AND THEOLOGY OF ILLNESS

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INTRODUCTION

In beginning to address the topic of *The Experience and Theology of Illness* we need to first set our framework and foundation as it is expressed in the teaching magisterium of the Catholic Church on the Christ who is Redemptor hominis¹, the Redeemer of man and on “man as the way of the Church, and Christ is the way of man”² for the dignity and salvation of the human person is at the mission of the Church in Christ.

We begin with the person - who has become a patient – with their own unique subjectivity, perceptions, coping methods, actions, and beliefs within their family, cultural and religious context - one who becomes forever changed from their experiences of having an illness.

As patients, family members, health care providers, pastoral care givers, and visitors to the sick we are called to the same vision of who each person is which is at the heart of Christ and to “be not afraid” as we walk the journey of an illness. In³ Pope Francis’ homily for the beatification of Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II, he stated, “{They} were not afraid to look upon the wounds of Jesus, to touch his torn hands and his pierced side. They were not ashamed of the flesh of Christ, they were not scandalized by him, by his cross; they did not despise the flesh of their brother (cf. *Is* 58:7), because they saw Jesus in every person who suffers and struggles.”

During our conversations we will look to address explicitly and implicitly the personal experiences of an illness on:

- The person as patient
- The person as primary caregiver
- The person of persons within a family
- The person as health care provider
- The person as pastoral/friendly visitor

We will not address here the wider implication within our social structures: cultural, economic, and political as it relates to illness.

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html

² The text of Pope Benedict XVI's homily at the beatification of Pope John Paul II on May 1, 2011 he wrote about Pope John Paul II vision of the human person.

³ Pope Francis’ homily on the Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday), 27 April 2014

MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

DUST AND BREATH

BODY AND SOUL

“Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. Gen 1:26 God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female* he created them. God blessed them.” Gen 1:27-28a

“Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Gen 2:7

DIGNITY OF THE BODY

"God saw everything that he made and behold it was very good, there was evening and then morning, the sixth day" Genesis 1:31

THROUGH HIM ALL CAME INTO BEING

John 1:1-5

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

JEREMIAH 1:5

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you”

PSALMS 139:13

“For it was you [God] who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb”

THE LINE OF DEMARCATION

WE ARE SUBJECTED TO THE LAW OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

In St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* he commented on the line of demarcation - which brought suffering into the world - it was the decision to eat of the fruit and its consequences leading to fallen state of the humanity:

"The first situation was that of original innocence and which man (male and female) was, as it were, outside the sphere of knowledge of good and evil, until the moment when they transgressed the Creator's command and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The second situation however was that in which man after having disobeyed the greatest command at the prompting of evil spirit, symbolized by the serpent, found himself in a certain way within the sphere of the knowledge of good and evil. The second situation determine the state of human sinfulness in contrast to the state of primitive innocence" (pg. 31).

"The revelation of the body contained in Genesis specially in chapter 3 shows the impressionist clearness of the cycle "knowledge – generation". It shows that the cycle so deeply rooted in the potentiality of the human body, was subjected, after sin to the law of suffering and death" (pg. 84).

REDEMPTION: GOD BECAME MAN

Jesus came and conquered sin and death. But what death? Sin and death of our souls, yet we have death of the natural body. We will rise again body and soul. How so? How can that happen?

What makes us human is that we have a body and soul in unity. Our resurrected bodies will be spiritual bodies.

"What is "rising"? In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection.⁴

⁴ Catechism 997

DEFINITIONS

HEALTH

Two Universal Definitions of Health each based upon the anthropology of the human person.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." [WHO]⁵

Do you know anyone who fits this definition?

SAINT POPE JOHN PAUL II

"Health is a dynamic tension towards physical, mental, social, and spiritual harmony, and not only the absence of illness, which gives man the ability to fulfill the mission which has been entrusted to him, according to the state of life in which he finds himself." [JPII]⁶

How true is this explanation in describing health?

A COMPARISON OF THESE TWO DEFINITIONS OF HEALTH

- ♦ WHO left out spiritual aspect of the human person. JPII has the model of the human person with a spiritual component - bio-psycho-social-spiritual model of the human person.
- ♦ "Dynamic tension...harmony" - implies a relational balance [if one is weak physically, yet one can be strong spiritually]
- ♦ "Towards"- implies that a 'complete well-being' in each area may not be realistic or achievable; and we, as human persons, are in a continuing state of 'being' [growing, learning] and one that has been given a mission in life [we do have a purpose]
- ♦ JPII places the role of health in the perspective as an aspect of the human person, but not one's ultimate fulfillment or one's ultimate goal or purpose in life to achieve

From God's eyes we can have a healthy cancer patient when we are in harmony... for one is continuing to move towards God... for our mission in life is to get to heaven and our purpose is to love God with our 'whole heart, mind and soul, and love one another as we love ourselves as He loves us.

⁵ <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html>

⁶ Definition presented to the International Catholic Medical Assoc Conference by the president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care message from Pope John Paul II for the World Day of the Sick Jubilee Year 2000

DISEASE

Disease is a complex term not easy to articulate for our notions of health are contextual and dependent for they exist in relationship to people and their cultural context. From a clinical perspective a disease has “biological and /or physiological malfunctions.”⁷

Where we can classify a disease based on the international classification of diseases the ICD, the global health information standard for mortality and morbidity, a person's illness or sickness is not so easily categorized.

What people believe about themselves to be ill will vary according to their social class, gender, race, and ethnic group, in addition other factors such as their proximity to support from family and other social constructs.⁸

ILLNESS

Illness can be defined as an collection of evolved responses to an disease.

“Illness refers to the sociocultural context within which disease is experienced. The patient and his/her family label, classify, and explain the sickness episode in such a way that it can be personally and socially meaningful (Kleinman 1978).”⁹

SICKNESS

“Sickness can also be regarded as a concept that combines the biomedical model (disease) with the sociocultural context of the patient (illness). Spirituality and religion can potentially play an important role in defining, understanding, and responding to disease within “illness.” For the “disease” part of sickness, the personal beliefs of a health or mental health care provider must also be considered, as they impact patient-provider communication.”¹⁰

⁷ http://nccc.georgetown.edu/body_mind_spirit/definitions_health_sickness.html National Center for Cultural Competence Georgetown University

⁸ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1299105/>

⁹ http://nccc.georgetown.edu/body_mind_spirit/definitions_health_sickness.html National Center for Cultural Competence Georgetown University

¹⁰ http://nccc.georgetown.edu/body_mind_spirit/definitions_health_sickness.html National Center for Cultural Competence Georgetown University

PAIN

“Pain is a perception that signals the individual that tissue damage has occurred or may be occurring. It is subjective and complex. The processes in the body that are involved in the perception of pain are called "nociception." Basic and clinical research during the past 50 years has confirmed that there are many mechanisms involved in nociception”.¹¹

Pain is not just physical, it is also psychological and spiritual. Pain can cause suffering.

SUFFERING

Suffering is beyond pain, it involves the whole person - one's physicality, their mental and emotional state, as well as their spiritual well-being. We have clinical methods to alleviate the physical and mental pain, yet it may not reduce the suffering related to such pain.

The needs of the patient - the person as patient - cannot be addressed fully by one person. Healthcare providers are overworked, family members are spread thin, and parishes are understaffed, thus the need for a ministry to the sick is even more needed today.

SPIRITUAL PAIN

“Spiritual pain is described in NANDA¹² (1994:49) as the “disruption in the principle which pervades a person's entire being and which integrates and transcends one's biological and psychosocial nature..... note that “spiritual distress and spiritual crisis” occur when a person is “unable to find sources of meaning, hope, love, peace, comfort, strength, and connection in life or when conflict occurs between their beliefs and what is happening in their life” ... The lists included, but were not limited to anger toward God, questioning the meaning of suffering or the meaning of one's own existence, verbal comments regarding an inner conflict about beliefs or about one's relationship with a deity, an inability to participate in one's usual religious practices, and more”.¹³

¹¹ <http://www.healingchronicpain.org/introduction/definitions>

¹² NANDA International (formerly the North American Nursing Diagnosis Association)

¹³ http://nccc.georgetown.edu/body_mind_spirit/pain_distress.html

EXPERIENCING ILLNESSES

3 BASIC NEEDS FOR WELL BEING

- ✓ Autonomy
- ✓ Competency
- ✓ Relatedness

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE LOSSES

When a person becomes a patient they enter into a different world. There are objective and subjective losses when one experiences illness such as:

- ✦ Loss of Independence & Autonomy
- ✦ Loss of Certainty & Control
- ✦ Loss of Self Identity
- ✦ Loss of being Heard
- ✦ Fear of being a Burden

RESPONSES: FEELING WORD LIST DURING ILLNESS

Emotional Feelings

Afraid	Distraught	Shocked
Agitated	Embarrassed	Sorrowful
Alarmed	Frightened	Taken aback
Bitter	Grieved	Terrified
Confused	Lonely	Troubled
Depressed	Sad	Uneasy
Discouraged	Scared	Upset

Sensing Spiritually

Abandoned	Detached	Hopeless
Alienated	Distrusting	Insecure
Apathetic	Doubtful	Lost
Brokenness	Fearful	Shameful
Defeated	Guilty	Tearful
Despair	Helpless	Weary

With Support

Accepting	Grateful	Steady
Calm	Joyful	Strong
Confident	Peaceful	Trustful
Comfortable	Reconciled	Touched
Contented	Relieved	Tranquil
Courageous	Secure	Warm

PHASES OF INCORPORATING OUR EXPERIENCES OF ILLNESS

Pamela Cooper-White in her essay *The Psycho Spiritual Implications of illness and Injury*¹⁴ she puts forth several stages in how we incorporate our experiences of illness and injury especially when it is sudden.

1. **Shocking and numbness** - it takes time to assimilate to a new reality
2. **Searching and yearning** - the inner reality is now able to catch up with the external situation
3. **Disorganization** - the phase where it resembles depression - experiences of disillusionment, sadness, grief, anger, despair, confusion, and other negative emotions
4. **Reorganization** - the phase in which the person is returning back to a new normal

THE UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS

What have I done to deserve this?

Why would God do this?

Why is this happening to me?

I find no answers! Why?

¹⁴ pg. 118-119 *Spiritual and psychological aspects of illness: Dealing with sickness, loss, dying and death* Edited by Musgrave and McGettigan

FINDING MEANING OF OUR EXPERIENCE

Many of us have continue to hold the image of God that we found in our childhood. Is God to us a punishing God as seen in some of the Old Testament Scriptures? How does one describe their illness in relation to God? John Bickel in his essay *The Spiritual Pain of Illness*, in finding meaning in our illness or losses, he describes three different ways we come to find meaning to these experiences:

-
1. Punishment (“I deserve this”)

 2. Mystery (“Why is it happening to me”)

 3. Ultimate source of good (“Something good can come out of this experience”)¹⁵

We will hear one or more of these ways of finding meaning expressed in the person’s narrative. Scripture needs to be taken as a whole, for if one only focuses on for example this pericope they will feel doomed.

In John J. Shea’s essay “*Illness and the Quest for an Adult Faith*”¹⁶ he addresses the importance of understanding the person’s image of God. Depending upon where one is developmentally in their spiritual life God is either a *super ego God* who is a Supreme Being, the God of law, a God of dependency and control versus the God of an adult faith who is a living God, is a *God as Thou*, it is a living God of love, and of mystery, of freedom, and of community.

Shea summarizes and restates that it is critical for a seriously ill person to be able to tell their story in order to be connected to reality in life. This is a challenge to address our image of God which we may lead us to stop believing in a super evil God, or it may leave us petitioning to God, or maybe we may begin a quest to experience the living God in relationship.

About listening to is seriously ill person, the author states that we need to be aware of what is happening developmentally to the person and that the listener honors the story by not changing it.

¹⁵ pg. 11 Partners in Healing: Bringing Compassion to People with Illness or Loss

¹⁶ pg. 86-94 Spiritual and psychological aspects of illness: Dealing with sickness, loss, dying and death Edited by Musgrave and McGettigan

THE LOSS INVENTORY

In Paul A. Metzler's essay "*Holy Living-Holy Dying*"¹⁷ he adapts Wolfelt's *Loss Inventory* for visitors to the sick in order to do an intentional examination to identify one's underlying feelings in order to bring your full self to the person, and also to be transformed and healed from your own sufferings.

Loss of people you loved

- ✓ separation
- ✓ rejections
- ✓ hostility/grudges
- ✓ illnesses such Alzheimers
- ✓ divorce
- ✓ abandonment
- ✓ betrayal
- ✓ death
- ✓ empty nest

Loss of Pets

Loss of Aspect of Self

- ✓ Self-esteem (often due to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse)
- ✓ Health, physical, or mental ability (due to aging or illness)
- ✓ Job (downsizing, firing, failed, business, retirement)
- ✓ Control (either addiction or victimization)
- ✓ Innocence (abuse, exposure to amoral behavior)

¹⁷ pg. 227-229 *Spiritual and psychological aspects of illness: Dealing with sickness, loss, dying and death* Edited by Musgrave and McGettigan

-
- ✓ Sexual identity/ ability / desire
 - ✓ Expectation (how our lives should/would be)
 - ✓ Security (financial problems or war)
 - ✓ Beliefs (religious, spiritual, belief in others we trusted)
 - ✓ Dreams (hope for the future)
-

Loss of Physical Objects

- ✓ Home – fire, natural disaster, move, or transition
 - ✓ Linking objects – special items such as photos, jewelry
 - ✓ Money – financial conditions, larceny
 - ✓ Belongings – theft, fire etc.
 - ✓ Natural – moving
-

Loss through a developmental transition

- ✓ toddler to childhood
 - ✓ childhood to adolescence
 - ✓ adolescence to adulthood
 - ✓ leaving home
 - ✓ marriage
 - ✓ having / not having children
 - ✓ mid-life
 - ✓ taking care of parents
 - ✓ retirement
 - ✓ old age
-

SICKNESS AND TRANSFORMATION¹⁸

When a person is experiencing a personal trauma illness or serious disease it becomes an event occasion for spiritual transformation where there may be a radical questioning and reorientation of one's life and priorities the characteristics of one's understanding of God may be called into question.

Spiritual transformation involves the view of the self: one's purpose, their beliefs even their behaviors and mental state.

Each person will find different meanings to their experiences of being ill. We both can have the same diagnosis, yet experience the same illness differently. In finding the common points for connections and departures, we can communicate and connect within an empathetic solidarity.

IMPORTANCE OF THE NARRATIVE

In John J. Cecero's essay *Positive Psychology : A new Paradigm*, he address the need to allow others to communicate their narrative by refraining from interrupting, or by giving advice. This is crucial in creating an environment where the sacred can become palpable.

In looking at the theology of illness and our faith experience has an implicit and explicit relationship with our Creator .

Cecero point to the work of Irish theologian Dermont Lane's work on the meaning hope within illness "hope takes energy to act, hope rises from within the person but only as an encounter with the external world of human beings for the human to exist always means to coexist and that is to be always in relationships".¹⁹

It is in an illness when we are stripped down to work out becoming receptive to many moments of grace.

¹⁸ Spiritual and psychological aspects of illness: Dealing with sickness, loss, dying and death Edited by Musgrave and McGettigan

¹⁹ Spiritual and psychological aspects of illness: Dealing with sickness, loss, dying and death Edited by Musgrave and McGettigan pg 16

ACUTE VERSUS CHRONIC ILLNESS

When a person is experiencing illness in acute stage which is self-limiting, a person can return back to their every day life ,yet there is still a transformation that has taken place if they have open themselves up to the Voice of God.

Once someone has a chronic illness they will usually experience acute episodes as if like a roller coaster ride, there they are in constant state reassessing and making adjustments in their physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual lives though within this instability there is one stable framework to rely on is God's presence.

WE HAVE NO BIOMARKERS FOR THE ILLNESS

Disease is the pathophysiology, while illness is the experience of living through the disease. We can measure biomarkers of the disease framework but the “illness” we cannot measure feelings and frustrations. For chronic illnesses or even severe acute states the experience of the illness lingers for longer after the recovery.

It is through only the surrendering to the challenge and journey will there be a spiritual renewal.

ACCEPTANCE

Robert Giugliano’s chapter on “*Psychological and Spiritual Reflections for Visitors to the Sick*”, he goes to describe one’s initial reactions to being diagnosed as an experience of desolation; also a refusal, becoming angry, withdrawn, hostile or aggressive with anxiety and depression. Once they accept their illness and able the to face the reality with a sense of humble acceptance then they will be able to move closer to God.

CONFLICTS

Shea now looks at the work of Andrew's of appropriating of Ericsson developmental stages from the perspective of a patient...

- ◆ The **experience of mistrust** is due to an overwhelming fear, in particular when facing a terminal or serious diagnosis. Other feelings of being embarrassed, feeling of shame by being different and distinct from others.

- ◆ **Conflicts** come into play when someone begins to reflect upon the causes of the disease such as punishment for past sins; why would God allow such things to happen; guilt; or a sense of incompetence.

- ◆ Another conflict occurs when once a person is diagnosed, they need to make decisions in regards to **who they will take into confidence** to share the deep recesses of their emotions and spiritual life.

INTEGRITY

Key components for a person to achieve integrity of wellbeing in the midst of an illness.

- ✓ Reconciliation

- ✓ Restitution

- ✓ Forgiveness

- ✓ Acceptance

RENEWAL

The focus is not just to be on the recovery, it needs to be more on the renewal.

The renewal of oneself as such is a shared process. It needs to be a dialogue in which caretaker, who in listening to the narrative of the ill person, enters into a mutual relationship. Both will experience a transformation in the movements through desolation and consolation in the sharing relationship.

In John J. Shea's essay "*Illness and the Quest for an Adult Faith*" he describes the proposal of Arthur Frank's three categories of narrative structures that the many stories of serious illnesses have: the restitution story, the chaos story and the quest story and the role of the listener be they the family, primary caretaker, healthcare provider, chaplain or friendly visitor.

The restitution story

It's the telling of getting sick, suffering, and treatment, ending in being restored to health. It's a story that is expected and encouraged by the medical community. It's a story of disease as an enemy that needs to be conquered. He notes when this story is not true, those who are seriously ill will experience isolation and an increase in their suffering. The caretaker needs to be there for them.

The chaos story

It's a story of the deepest illness where one lives in unrelenting pain with the chronic permanent disability, it is not able to be successfully treated leading to downhill spiral into multifaceted problems: work, family, social, financial, housing, where there is little solution to be found. The caretaker needs to honor the person suffering.

The quest story

This is when the person understands this as a learning journey where the individual believes their illness had led them to new insights and transformation. There is a sense of giving up the old, a renewal of finding, a new gratefulness to the condition. There's an acceptance and a deeper meaning within the narrative for the listener to listen for.

For all three of these this is the story of the patient's journey and it is theirs to tell.

A MUTUALITY OF TRANSFORMATION

ROLE OF CAREGIVERS

Pamela Cooper-White in her essay “*Dancing Partners*” write about ‘**aloneness of an illness**’ versus loneliness, because each illness is experienced by the individual be they the patient, family caregiver, or the healthcare provider.

Carrying the Burden

Common experience of family members and caregivers there can be a sense of helplessness by wanting to take the pain on themselves as we see in parents for their children and spouses for their mate. Though we may not be able to remove their pain we may be able to offer comfort to reduce the suffering.

Though I have not touched much on the experience of the caregiver, their role is to partner with the patient offering affirmation, holy listening of the feelings, the fears, and the concerns. Will address this in next presentation. Caregivers, who ever they might be, offers a sense of controlled support and companionship while supporting the patient in communicating their needs. On the other hand, their experiences maybe just as deep in walking with someone who is suffering, especially a loved one and be always be transformed by it.

THEOLOGY OF ILLNESS

A RENEWED PURPOSE UNITING WITH CHRIST

SUFFERING IS REDEMPTIVE WHEN UNITED TO CHRIST

“Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share in (eschatological) glory.”²⁰

Redemptive Suffering is when we accept our sufferings and offer them up in union the Passion of Christ, such as payment - a remittance - for one sins or the sins of another ,or for the physical or spiritual needs of oneself or another; it does not offer forgiveness of sins but reduces the penalty for sins.

ONLY GOD MADE MAN COULD BE CAPABLE OF CAPTURING ALL OF THE EVIL CONTAINED IN THE HISTORY OF MAN.

“Here we touch upon the duality of nature of a single personal subject of redemptive suffering. He who by His passion and death on the cross brings about the Redemption is the only-begotten Son whom God "gave." And at the same time this Son who is consubstantial with the Father suffers as a man. His suffering has human dimensions; it also has unique in the history of humanity a depth and intensity which, while being human, can also be an incomparable depth and intensity of suffering, insofar as the man who suffers is in person the only-begotten Son Himself: "God from God." Therefore, only He--the only begotten Son--is capable of embracing the measure of evil contained in the sin of man: in every sin and in "total" sin, according to the dimensions of the historical existence of humanity on earth.²¹

20 Salvifici Doloris, p22, Apostolic Letter from JohnPaul II, July 15, 1999

21 <https://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/rdmpc1.htm> Letter of Pope John Paul II on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, 11 February 1984 On the Redemptive Suffering of Christ (abridged from sections 14-21)

EVANGELIUM VITAE: THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

The fullness of life exceeds our earthly existence reaches its fullness in divine life through Jesus Christ

“Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-2) ...”²²

““The name of Jesus ... has made this man strong" (Acts 3:16): in the uncertainties of human life, Jesus brings life's meaning to fulfillment...”²³

“By faith in Jesus, "the Author of life" (Acts 3:15), life which lies abandoned and cries out for help regains self-esteem and full dignity.”²⁴

“In moments of sickness too, man is called to have the same trust in the Lord and to renew his fundamental faith in the One who "heals all your diseases" (cf. Ps 103:3). When every hope of good health seems to fade before a person's eyes-so as to make him cry out: "My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass" (Ps 102:11)- even then the believer is sustained by an unshakable faith in God's life-giving power. Illness does not drive such a person to despair and to seek death, but makes him cry out in hope: "I kept my faith, even when I said, ?I am greatly afflicted" " (Ps 116:10); "O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit" (Ps 30:2-3).”²⁵

²² Evangelium Vitae ("The Gospel of Life"), JPII 1995, 2

²³ Evangelium Vitae ("The Gospel of Life"), JPII 1995, 31

²⁴ Evangelium Vitae ("The Gospel of Life"), JPII 1995, 32

²⁵ Evangelium Vitae ("The Gospel of Life"), JPII 1995, 46

ILLNESS, SUFFERING, REDEMPTION

PUNISHMENT - SICKNESS AND DEFEAT

There are many scriptural references where we can read that disease and illnesses are punishment from God for either their sins or the generational sins they had once inherited. Yet, there are many more references of His saving grace and help, which we need to focus on when we are ill or working with a person who have become or been a patient.

“The LORD will send on you a curse,..... until you are speedily destroyed and perish for the evil you have done in forsaking me. Your corpses will become food for all the birds of the air and for the beasts of the field, with no one to frighten them off...The LORD will strike you with Egyptian boils and with tumors, skin diseases and the itch, from none of which you can be cured. And the LORD will strike you with madness, blindness and panic, so that even at midday you will grope in the dark as though blind, unable to find your way.²⁶

WHY? - THE MYSTERY

NEW TESTAMENT: SALVATION AND VICTORY

The Judeo Christian tradition maintains that human suffering is objectively evil [not that the person deserves it, even if they sinned] and we are obliged to alleviate the sufferings of others. Yet as Christians the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a mystery - the Paschal Mystery. This offers us a transformative meaning of the experience of pain and suffering in our lives for this is to be patterned after Jesus Christ salvific actions.

In visiting the sick we need to ask ourselves what is our personal experience and personal understanding of the theology and teaching of the Catholic Church regarding suffering.

²⁶ Deu 28: 20-28

MYSTERY OF SICKNESS

“Only in the Crucified Christ do we find the explanation of the mystery of sickness”

Vatican City, 22 March 2015 (VIS) - “It is not easy to approach a patient. The most beautiful and most miserable things in life are reserved, they conceal themselves. One tries to hide the greatest love, out of modesty; and for modesty we also hide those things that demonstrate our human misery”.

With these words the Pope addressed the patients he met in the Basilica of Gesù Nuovo yesterday, explaining that to approach a patient it is necessary to go to him, since the modesty of life leads him to conceal himself.

“When there are lifelong illnesses, when we find ourselves faced with maladies that affect an entire life, we prefer to hide them, because going to visit a patient means going and finding our own sickness. It means having the courage to say to oneself: I too have a malady of the heart, of the soul, of the spirit; I too am spiritually afflicted”.

Francis spoke of the mystery of sickness, explaining that although God created us to change the world, to be efficient, to dominate Creation, “when we find ourselves before sickness, we see that the ailment prevents this: that man or that woman who was born this way, or who became this way, seems to say 'no' to the mission of transforming the world. ... We are only able to approach the sick ... if we accustom ourselves to looking at the Crucified Christ, as here is the only explanation for this 'failure', this human failure, this ailment throughout our lives”.

“If you cannot understand the Lord”, he said to the patients present, “I ask the Lord to make you understand in your hearts that you are the flesh of Christ”. Francis thanked the volunteers who spend their time “caressing Christ's flesh, serving the crucified and living Christ”, and the doctors and nurses who have not transformed their profession into a form of trade, as “when medicine turns into trade, into business, it is like the priesthood when it acts in the same way: it loses the kernel of its vocation”.

Finally, he urged all the Christians of the diocese of Naples not to forget what Jesus asked us, and what we will all be judged upon: “I was sick, and you cared for me”. “The sick suffer: they are a reflection of the suffering Christ”, he concluded. “Do not be afraid to draw close to Christ who suffers”.

SUMMARY FROM SALVIFICI DOLORIS

On April 02, 2005 news spread across the globe, shocking us to tears. Pope John Paul II had died. For those who meet him in person, it was a humbling privilege. He had taught the world about suffering, through his life. He showed us how to live with suffering, now to forgive, and how to die with dignity as Christ wants for all of us.

In reviewing every so briefly the Theology of Illness, we can gather much from his writings especially his encyclical *Salvifici Doloris* on the Christian meaning of Human Suffering. Suffering is a burden and a joy: Burden - *carry your cross and follow me* ; and Joy - *I am the truth and the life*.

Let's look back on our definitions again.

- “Illness refers to the sociocultural context within which disease is experienced.”
- “Sickness can also be regarded as a concept that combines the biomedical model (disease) with the sociocultural context of the patient (illness).”
- Suffering is beyond pain, it involves the whole person - one's physicality, their mental and emotional state, as well as their spiritual well-being.

Can we ever experience an illness without any suffering? The experience of illness is the experience of suffering

INTRODUCTION (NN. 1-4)

Suffering he states requires us to look deeper into ourselves, and to seek behind the actual reality of life itself. Suffering is universal and historic for humankind.. all creatures have pain, yet ‘the human person’ is a creature who suffers.

It involves the whole person – body, mind, soul, and leads the person to compassion though it intimidates us. We experience fear and dread of the very idea of suffering yet it evokes a social dimension of its own – solidarity with another. We suffer with others.

Suffering called us to look to the transcendent aspect of ourselves. It causes us to reflect on *the why?*

The answer is a mystery yet we can look to the One who has given us life to His words and actions for we have been redeemed through His suffering.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28)

THE WORLD OF HUMAN SUFFERING (NN. 5-8)

Suffering is complex: we can suffer physical, mentally and emotionally, and morally. Our health care system has some answers and remedies, yet not for moral suffering. We often consciously or unconsciously connect suffering with evil.

Suffering of the innocent – why?

The in Judeo-Christian tradition suffering is seen as a:

- punishment for evil - a justice being served it repays evil
- form of ‘education’ done out of love – returning us back to God
- an act of love – redeeming

What does moral suffering has to do with illness and the experience of how disease is experienced by the patient within their social/cultural context?

JPII states: “Sacred Scripture is a *great book about suffering*’ ...the theme of suffering can be found in *the book of the history of man* (this is rather an "unwritten book")...(6)

“It can be said that man suffers whenever *he experiences any kind of evil*. In **the vocabulary** of the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other.... Thus the reality of suffering prompts the question about the essence of evil: what is evil? This questions seems, in a certain sense, inseparable from the theme of suffering (7).

QUEST FOR AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF SUFFERING (NN. 9-13)

It is through the question of the meaning of suffering we begin to find answers in the ‘Punishment of the innocent’ the Story of Job – where his friends believe he sinned.

“Man can put this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the Revelation of the Old Testament. In the Book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression. The story of this just man, who without any fault of his own is tried by innumerable sufferings, is well known. He loses his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself is afflicted by a grave sickness.” (10)

In this story we find one reason: suffering is not only a punishment for sin, it is a test of righteousness. Job knew “I am innocent” – his faith was being tested.

This story is a prefiguring of the Paschal Mystery – the innocent suffers.

His friends believed he did something wrong, for suffering only strikes one as a punishment, and that justice would be served based upon the degree of what he has done, or so they believed. For it is the “God of Revelation who is the *Lawgiver and Judge*. There is a transcendent moral order based upon justice. Job challenges this idea that suffering as a punishment.. for he was innocent, it was a mystery beyond his own understanding.

“While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, *it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment*”(11)

The educational value of suffering as an invitation to his mercy

“Thus in the sufferings inflicted by God upon the Chosen People there is included an invitation of his mercy, which corrects in order to lead to conversion: “... these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people”(2 Mac 2:12).(12)

The question remains unanswered in the OT, why the innocent. Only until we enter into the NT shall part of the mystery be revealed to us.

JESUS CHRIST: SUFFERING CONQUERED BY LOVE (NN. 14-18)

The *Song of the Suffering Servant* in Isaia's prophecy speaks of Christ as the One chosen by God the Father to suffer for His people (Is:53) .

Because of sin we experience suffering, the line of demarcation. Christ saves us from the eternal suffering from sin, which is the suffering of being separate from God for all eternity. Yet His redemptive work did not abolish temporal suffering, it shines a light on it.

Death is the final experience of suffering this world.... our souls survives and body decays - "you are dust and to dust you shall return". Jesus' resurrection began the process for the future resurrection of the body.

Jesus came to redeem us, took all of the evil in the world onto Himself, only God could do that, as payment. He conquered sin and death in His divinity, yet his suffering was completely human, voluntary and innocent. Now through him suffering has now been linked to love where we can draw good from it for we now can exist on earth with the hope of eternal life.

SHARERS IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST (NN. 19-24)

Now even our suffering is redeemed because of His suffering.

"He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age"(Gal. 1:4), and in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body "(1 Cor 6:20).

We are called to join our suffering in His suffering through Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5) Redeemed does not mean we will not suffer, not be ill or have a physical death of the body, it does transform the suffering into a merit of grace. A merit is one only God can give.

The Church is the Body of Christ, we are members of His Body, the body shares in His suffering. We 'complete it' (for it is ongoing) for the Church, is where Christ leaves the invitation open to us, He completes it in us, not we complete it in Him.

Only when we come to identify with Christ, join with him in his passion. Suffering is no longer is useless. Through Christ we become transformed from a depressed feeling and useless into an interior certainty JPII writes.

"Letter to the Romans he writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"(Rom. 12:1)...Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he *rediscovers them, through faith*, enriched with a new content and new meaning." (20)

"For through faith the Cross reaches man *together with the Resurrection*: the mystery of the Passion is contained in the Paschal Mystery. The witnesses of Christ's Passion are at the same time witnesses of his Resurrection. Paul writes: "That I may know him (Christ) and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead"(Phil. 3:10-11)."

"And Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says this: "We ourselves boast of you... for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be made *worthy of the Kingdom of God*, for which you are suffering"(2 Thes. 1:4-5).. Thus to share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God."

"Suffering, in fact, is always *a trial*—at times a very hard one—to which humanity is subjected. The gospel *paradox of weakness and strength* often speaks to us from the pages of the Letters of Saint Paul, a paradox particularly experienced by the Apostle

himself and together with him experienced by all who share Christ's sufferings. Paul writes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"(2 Cor. 12:9). In the Second Letter to Timothy we read: "And therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed"(2 T m. 1:12). And in the Letter to the Philippians he will even say: "*I can do all things in him* who strengthens me"(Phil. 4:13.)."....[t]he theme of this "birth of power in weakness", this *spiritual tempering* of man in the midst of trials and tribulations, which is the particular vocation of those who share in Christ's sufferings." (23)

"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"(Col. 1:24). And in another Letter he asks his readers: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"(1 Cor. 6:15)". (24)

In an online executive summary of this encyclical the author writes:

"Because the Church is the Body of Christ, that Body shares in the sufferings of Christ Himself. As St. Paul says, we "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His Body, the Church." This means that man's suffering is joined with the Paschal mystery. The suffering Christ endured is by no means incomplete or insufficient, but *our* participation in it, as His Body, is what must be completed. Christ leaves this redemptive suffering open so that it can be completed in us. Christ's Body, the Church, lives this redemptive suffering throughout its history." ²⁷

²⁷ <http://www.catholiccrossreference.com/blog/2014/10/09/summary-of-salvifici-doloris-on-the-christian-meaning-of-human-suffering/>

THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING

“As a witness *to* her Son's Passion by her *presence*, and as a sharer in it by her *compassion*, Mary offered a unique contribution to the Gospel of suffering.” (25)

“Christ *did not conceal* from his listeners *the need for suffering*. He said very clearly: "If any man would come after me... let him take up his cross daily "(Lk. 9:23), and before his disciples he placed demands of a moral nature that can only be fulfilled on condition that they should "deny themselves" The way that leads to the Kingdom of heaven is "hard and narrow", and Christ contrasts it to the "wide and easy" way that "leads to destruction"(Mt. 7:13-14).²⁵

“Through the Resurrection, he manifests *the victorious power of suffering*, and he wishes to imbue with the conviction of this power the hearts of those whom he chose as Apostles and those whom he continually chooses and sends forth. The Apostle Paul will say: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"(2 Tm. 3:12). (25)

“This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the *result* of a particular *conversion* and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. (26)

“[t]his interior process does not always follow the same pattern. It often begins and is set in motion with great difficulty. Even the very point of departure differs: people react to suffering in different ways. But in general it can be said that almost always the individual enters suffering with a *typically human protest* and *with the question "why"*.... Christ the salvific meaning of suffering *descends to man's level* and becomes, in a sense, the individual's personal response. It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spiritual joy.” (26)

CATHOLIC CATECHISM

ILLNESS IN HUMAN LIFE

“Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.” 1500

“Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.” 1501

THE SICK PERSON BEFORE GOD

“The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing.⁹⁹ Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the healing.¹⁰⁰ It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer."¹⁰¹ The prophet intuitively understands that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others.¹⁰² Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness.¹⁰³” 1502

CHRIST THE PHYSICIAN

“Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healing of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people"¹⁰⁴ and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins;¹⁰⁵ he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of.¹⁰⁶ His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me."¹⁰⁷ His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.” 1503

DEATH

BODILY DEATH IS NATURAL, THE SOUL RETURNS FIRST THEN DUST RETURNS TO THE EARTH, JESUS SHOWED US HOW TO DIE BY ACCEPTANCE AND FREE WILL SUBMISSION.

“It is in regard to death that man's condition is most shrouded in doubt.”⁵⁶⁷ In a sense bodily death is natural, but for faith it is in fact "the wages of sin."⁵⁶⁸ For those who die in Christ's grace it is a participation in the death of the Lord, so that they can also share his Resurrection.”⁵⁶⁹ 1006

Death is the end of earthly life.

“Our lives are measured by time, in the course of which we change, grow old and, as with all living beings on earth, death seems like the normal end of life. That aspect of death lends urgency to our lives: remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment: Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, . . . before the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” 1007

Death is a consequence of sin.

“The Church's Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmations of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man's sin.⁵⁷¹ Even though man's nature is mortal God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin.⁵⁷² "Bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned" is thus "the last enemy" of man left to be conquered.”⁵⁷³ 1008

Death is transformed by Christ.

“Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father's will.⁵⁷⁴ The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing.”⁵⁷⁵ 1009

SCRIPTURAL PRAYERS

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT PRESENTATION ON THE THEOLOGY OF THE PASTORAL VISIT AND PRAYERS FOR THE SICK

SOURCE OF GOOD - THE WORDS OF JESUS

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”²⁸ “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”²⁹

THE PERSON AS PATIENT

"Even now I find my joy in the suffering I am doing for you in my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ for the sake of his body the church.”³⁰

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”³¹

THE PERSON AS CAREGIVER

“...I was ill and you comforted me...”³² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³³

²⁸ 2 Cor 12:9

²⁹ John 16:33

³⁰ Colossians 1:24

³¹ Rom 8:28

³² Matt 25:36b

³³ Gal 6:2

LECTIO DIVINA: READING WHEN A PATIENT

-
- ✦ When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Ps 34:17-20

 - ✦ The Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. The Lord sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health. As for me, I said, "O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me..." Ps 41:2-4

 - ✦ For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord ... Jer 30:17-24

 - ✦ When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Ps 34:17-20

 - ✦ The Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. The Lord sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health. As for me, I said, "O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me..." Ps 41:2-4

 - ✦ The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Ps 34:7

 - ✦ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Matt 8:17

SCRIPTURAL PRAYERS TO SAY WHEN A PATIENT

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- ✦ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Ps 73:24-27

 - ✦ In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! Ps 31:1-2

 - ✦ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Ps 73:24-27

PRAYER FOR CAREGIVERS FOR AND WITH PATIENT

- ♦ And God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Ph 4:19
- ♦ May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace! Ps 29:11
- ♦ And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive.... Matt 21:22
- ♦ (K)eep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because she/he trusts in You. Is 26:3
- ♦ By his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24