

## **Sat PM Retr Talk... Our Hurting World**

### **Introduction**

This morning we considered Jesus bringing hope and compassion to our suffering world.

Despite Jesus' ministry and presence among those who suffered, and his mission of healing and bringing the Good News of God's love for all... despite his own suffering and death on the Cross which bring the power of forgiveness and God's love to the darkness and sin of our world... despite all of this, one question always confronts me...

Darkness still overshadows our world.  
Suffering and pain still haunts us.  
Sin... even if it is politically forbidden to mention this word in polite company...  
sin is still a part of humanity –  
read your daily newspapers.  
Obviously Jesus' mission of healing and reconciliation, peace-giving and forgiveness-bringing isn't finished.

How do we disciples of Jesus deal with this darkness of suffering and pain and sin in our world?

### **I Suffering**

Suffering is a part of our human condition  
whether is it caused by medical conditions,  
human interactions,  
government policies or lack of policies,  
our own brokenness  
the inhumanness of others,  
or the sin of others.

We do all that we can to alleviate suffering and pain.  
But life quickly shows us that suffering is an inevitable part of our world.

In his famous interview published in America Magazine our present Pope Francis repeats four times that the Church should "heal the wounds." He

describes the Church as a "field hospital." (**America** Magazine, *Interview with Antonio Spadaro, S.J.*, Sept 20, 2-13)

In his homily of March 24, 2013 Francis said this:

*Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions,  
but from having encountered a Person, Jesus, in our midst;  
it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone,  
even at difficult moments,  
even when our life's journey comes up against problems  
and obstacles that seem insurmountable,  
and there are so many of them!  
In this moment the enemy, the devil, comes,  
often disguised as an angel,  
and slyly speaks his word to us.  
Do not listen to him! Let us follow Jesus!*

Let us continue to examine this.

## **II Suffering and God**

When studying theology, dealing with suffering and evil is called the problem of "theodicy."

How can a good and loving God allow massive evil and suffering to continue?

I don't presume to answer this question.

For one thing, the discussion could get very theoretical, and pretty soon we'd be bumping heads with this opinion and that opinion.

I suggest you go to [www.tothesource.org](http://www.tothesource.org), and search "theodicy" for some good material and even debates between atheists and believers.

My question is simpler...

How do we disciples of Jesus deal with our own suffering, the suffering of those we love, or the massive suffering and evil present in our world?

How do we react when we read our daily newspaper?

Some people who suffer isolate themselves and numb themselves to others and to God. They alienate themselves and become self absorbed.

Others who encounter suffering re-examine their lives and their attitudes and their values. This can lead to a change of perspective and even to a deeper sense of God in their lives.

Some people whose loved ones suffer become angry and resentful... "Why does this happen," they ask.

When loved ones suffer many reach out for help.

So my question is:

*How do we handle the suffering that comes into our lives?*

*How do we handle the suffering that comes into the lives of others, including our loved ones?*

If you believe that life is about being happy all of the time and buying new and improved stuff which is guaranteed to make you happy or your money back... suffering is opaque and unexplainable.

If you believe that we are made to be consumers and to have bigger and better toys that will make us happy... suffering is opaque and unexplainable.

In his Encyclical **Culture of Life** St. John Paul II reminds us that we are created in God's image and we have value beyond consuming and producing or 'having'.

Once again, let's listen to Pope Francis' Address of March 20, 2013...

*Before all else, we need to keep alive in our world the thirst for the absolute,*

*and to counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person,  
a vision that reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume.*

*This is one of the most insidious temptations of our time.*

So many people in our culture are passive consumers of mediated reality thru aggressive discourses that seek to form us socially and spiritually thru 24/7 media bombardment.

Can this bring us happiness?

The problem is that the promises of happiness and salvation that neuroscience, psychology, sociology, ethnology, micro biology, pharmacology and any other -ology... have not come true.

The sciences are important and are needed to improve the human lot and to relieve suffering and pain.

But the sciences are unable to deliver eradication of suffering... are unable to bestow salvation from darkness and sin.

Listen to these words of Pope Benedict XVI:

*Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if anything, increased in recent decades. Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power.*

*This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering.*

*(See Encyclical **Spes Salvi**, # 30))*

Suffering enters everyone's life. How do we handle it?

Does God desert us in our suffering?

Do we see God's presence in our suffering?

Can we see God in the many faceted faces of suffering in our world?

### **III Woddy Allen**

#### **Woody Allen's Bleak Vision**

*By Very Rev. Robert Barron*

*I was chagrined, but not entirely surprised, when I read Woody Allen's recent ruminations on ultimate things. To state it bluntly, Woody could not be any bleaker in regard to the issue of meaning in the universe. We live, he said, in a godless and purposeless world. The earth came into existence through mere chance and one day it, along with every work of art and cultural accomplishment, will be incinerated. The universe as a whole will expand and cool until there is nothing left but the void. Every hundred years or so, he continued, a coterie of human beings will be "flushed away" and another will replace it until it is similarly eliminated.*

*So why does he bother making films—roughly one every year? Well, he explained, in order to distract us from the awful truth about the meaninglessness of everything, we need diversions, and this is the service that artists provide. In some ways, low level entertainers are probably more socially useful than high-brow artistes, since the former manage to distract more people than the latter. After delivering himself of this sunny appraisal, he quipped, "I hope everyone has a nice afternoon!"*

*(Google **Word on Fire**, search Woody Allen's Bleak Vision.)*

How bleak!

### **V The Passion of Jesus**

Let's go back again to Jesus' suffering and Passion.

We Christians believe that our God does not abandon us in our suffering and the darkness of our world.

Jesus himself was subjected to torture and painful execution. Jesus, our God, walked thru the dark valley of suffering and death...

He is the innocent one who willingly suffered for us guilty.

Jesus mounted the gibbet of the cross,  
embraced his suffering,

confronted pain and darkness and even death...

and was victorious.

The dark powers of evil and death could not hold Jesus in bondage.

Easter Sunday follows **Good** Friday.

Jesus now calls us, his disciples, to share in his victory of new life, even in the midst of our world's suffering and pain.

Jesus calls us to continue his mission of bringing God's hope and compassion to our suffering world.

Jesus promises us that he will be with us and will send us his very own Spirit to empower us.

I just want to briefly mention the suffering we might encounter because of our following Jesus.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says:

*Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me.*

*Be glad and rejoice because your reward is great in heaven.*

Here we enter the very sufferings of the innocent one who died for us.

We suffer because we are disciples of Jesus who walk in his ways.

Jesus promises us a reward, but not necessarily in this life.

The martyrs across the centuries now gather round God's throne and join all of the angels and saints in proclaiming God's greatness. (See Rev. 7:13ff)

#### **IV Some stories**

I often turn to stories to help me deal with difficult and dark ruminations.

##### **Story: The Seattle Olympics**

*At the Seattle Special Olympics a number of years ago nine contestants, all physical or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash.*

*At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run to the finish and win.*

*All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry.*

*They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back... every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "this will make it better."*

*Then all link linked arms and walked together to the finish line.*

*Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story.*

Why? Why does this story touch so many people?

Because deep down most people intuit something beautiful in this story, something more important than winning.

People were not turned off because of the handicaps of these kids.

People didn't look the other way because of their obvious lack of perfection.

In our competitive culture, winning, being # 1, competition, and coming in first place... for many people this is what life is all about.

We pay our sports figures inordinate amounts of money to win... and very few can stand a loser.

When it comes to living in the *real* world, this approach to life has taken hold of many people.

Then we hear the story of the Seattle Olympics and it touches us.

Life is about reaching out to help others...

It's about helping others in the midst of their pain and imperfections.

Handicaps do not destroy the dignity, the beauty and the worth of people.

No one is useless.

Isn't this part of the story of Jesus?

### **Another Story... Noonday Devil**

In a wonderful book entitled **The Noonday Devil** by Andrew Solomon, the author describes in vivid detail his own experiences with his deep, deep depression, and how he slowly came to terms with it.

With the help of his psychiatrist and his meds he was finally able to rise above his depression. He then turned his experiences into an insightful and challenging book. Rather than deny his depression, or pretend he never had it, he shares four lessons, which he learned from it.

- ❖ *When you have been depressed you lose some of your fear of crisis... I made it through one.*
- ❖ *I learned compassion... I know what other sufferers are going through and I want to help.*
- ❖ *Depression at its worst is the most horrifying loneliness, and from it I learned the value of intimacy... I can help others in their loneliness – not necessarily with answers, but with simple companionship.*
- ❖ *The unexamined life is unavailable to the depressed. I learned to examine my life and see the good in it and not take my friends and loved ones for granted. (PP. 436 – 438)*

*The author learned the great value of adversity and discovered values and family and friends and a desire to help others, and not take joy for granted. (P 439)*

*The author learned that our needs are our greatest assets – we come to know ourselves through adversity – not illusions – and we open ourselves to others in our weakness. This can create bondedness. (P441)*

### **A Final Story... The Cracked Diamond**

*Once in a far off kingdom there was a precious diamond, the largest ever known, hundreds of carets in weight, brilliant, flawless and perfect in every way.*

*People from all around came to the kingdom to admire its famous diamond. The king and his subjects were rightfully proud of the diamond.*

*Then one day a servant of the king burst into his chambers with terrible news. The diamond now had a crack in it. The king rushed to see this tragedy and was stuck speechless at the sight. The entire kingdom mourned.*

*The king then sent out word that he would pay a king's ransom to anyone who could fix the diamond.*

*Many diamond merchants and diamond cutters came from near and far, but no one would dare touch the diamond – they pronounced that the crack could not be mended without destroying the entire diamond.*



*Then one day an elderly gentleman appeared who told the king that he could fix the diamond. If the king would allow him to take it home with him he would return it lovelier than it had been.*

*The king looked a long time at the old man, then told him that he would not allow the old man to take the diamond home with him, but he would allow him to work on it in a basement room of his castle, and he would give him food and drink while he worked, and a handsome payment if he was successful. The old man accepted the offer of the king.*

*After a month in the closely guarded basement room of the castle the old man came to the king and announced the diamond was ready to be displayed.*

*The king invited all of his subjects into the large courtyard of the castle for the unveiling of the refurbished diamond. The old man pulled the covered diamond on a wagon into the courtyard, then unveiled the diamond for all to see.*

*Everyone gasped, and the king was beside himself – with joy. For now the diamond was more stunning and attractive than ever. The old man had carved the diamond into a beautiful and delicate rose, and the crack had now become the stem of the rose. Everyone cheered and rejoiced. The old man had indeed saved their precious diamond.*

Suffering, pain and sin enters everyone's life.

Everyone is "cracked" to some extent.

How do we handle our own weaknesses and our faults,  
our emotional scars and disappointments,  
our intellectual incapacities and dreams unfulfilled,  
our potentials wasted and our regrets,  
our sicknesses and failures?

These are the cracks in our diamond.

What do we do about them?

Many times we Americans have a need to appear perfect,  
to be in charge,  
to have all of the answers –  
and we have a hard time dealing with our "cracks".

We reject them, deny them, or hide them.

The children with handicaps in the Seattle Olympics helped each other.  
They did not let their handicaps turn their lives into themselves,  
They inspired thousands of people.

What does God teach us thru this experience...

Thru our weaknesses, our failures, and our suffering,  
can we see God's hand in our lives and especially in our suffering?

I have worked with men and women in AA for over thirty years now, and  
many of them tell similar stories –

through the "crack" of their alcoholism

which they have dealt with through the help of God and the assistance of  
other alcoholics in AA,

their lives have mended and become enriched,

and they have now used their frightful experiences of the past  
to help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Their cracked, broken lives

have been turned into beautiful diamond roses with the help of God and  
others in AA.

They have become wounded healers.

Listen to this Poem and the Story of the person who wrote it...

## **V Back to Jesus**

What was the only thing Jesus took to heaven with him?

His wounds!

Jesus is a wounded healer,  
and through his wounds we are healed.

Jesus had to trust his loving Father to heal his woundedness,  
his seeming failure facing the powers of death.

God stood by Jesus in his weakness and woundedness,  
when his diamond seemed ruined beyond repair.

And now Jesus stands by us in compassion and love and forgiveness.

Jesus strengthens us in our adversity,  
when our diamond seems cracked beyond repair at times.

Jesus helps us through our sufferings and crises.  
And we learn patience and courage,  
faith and trust,  
compassion and gratitude.  
With the help of God's amazing grace the light shines brighter and more  
glorious than ever before from our diamond.  
And finally, we are tasked to continue Jesus' mission of bringing mercy and  
compassion and hope to our hurting world.

## **Conclusion**

What have we looked at this afternoon?

Jesus mission of compassion and hope are not finished.

### **I Suffering**

Suffering is a part of our human condition

Pope Francis, Homily, March 24, 2013

Pope Benedict XVI, Spes Salvi, # 30

### **II Suffering and God**

The problem of Theodicy

How do people handle suffering?

How do we handle suffering?

Pope Francis, Address of March 20, 2013

### **III Woody Allen**

Life is meaningless.

### **IV Some Stories**

Seattle Olympics

Noonday Devil

Cracked Diamond

**V Back to Jesus**

By his wounds we are healed.

Our mission

**End Notes**

A fuller quote from Pope Benedict XVI:

*...Suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today.*

*Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering.*

*These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life.*

*Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if anything, increased in recent decades. Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power.*

*This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering.*

*Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to "take away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29) is present in the world.*

*Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope—not yet fulfillment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly*

*hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.*  
(Encyclical **Spes Salvi**, # 30))

### **Another Story**

#### **Poem**

#### ***The Touch of the Master's Hand***

Twas battered and scarred  
 and the auctioneer thought  
 it scarcely worth his while  
 To waste much time on the old violin  
 But held it up with a smile.  
 "What am I bid, good folks?", he cried.  
 "Who'll start the bidding for me?"  
 "A dollar, a dollar – now two – only two!  
 Who will make it three?  
 Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three!"  
 But no. From the room far back  
 A gray haired man came forward and picked up the bow.  
 Then wiping the dust from the old violin,  
 And tightening up all the strings,  
 He played a melody pure and sweet,  
 As sweet as an angel sings.  
 The music ceased and the auctioneer,  
 With a voice that was quiet and low, said,  
 "What am I bid for the old violin?"  
 And he held it up with the bow.  
 "A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?  
 Two thousand, and who'll make it three?  
 Three thousand once, and three thousand twice,  
 And going, and gone", said he.  
 The people cheered,  
 but some of them cried,  
 "We don't quite understand – what changed its worth?"  
 The man replied, "The touch of the Master's hand."  
 And many a man with life out of tune,  
 And battered and torn with sin,  
 Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd,  
 Much like that old violin.  
 A "mess of pottage", a glass of wine,  
 A game and he travels on.  
 He's going once and going twice,  
 He going and almost gone.  
 But the Master comes and the foolish crowd

Never can quite understand the worth of a soul,  
 And the change that's wrought by  
***The touch of the Master's hand.***

This poem was written by Myra Brooks Welch.  
 She was called "the poet with the singing soul."  
 Her's was a very musical family.  
 As a young woman Myra's special love was playing the organ.  
 In 1921 she heard a speaker address a group of students.  
 She said she became filled with light, and "Touch of the Master's Hand wrote  
 itself in 30 minutes."  
 She sent it anonymously to here church news bulletin.  
 She felt it was a gift from God, and didn't need her name on it. It's  
 popularity spread like magic.  
 inally, several years later, the poem was read at a religious international  
 convention, "author unknown."  
 A young man stood up and said, "I know the author, and it's time the world  
 did too. It was written by my mother, Myra Welch.  
 Then her name, as well as her other beautiful works of poetry became  
 known worldwide.  
 All of her poetry told of the rejoicing she had in God's love.

What the world did not see was the woman who created these masterpieces:  
 Myra in her wheel chair,  
 battered and scarred from severe arthritis,  
 which had taken away her ability to make music.  
 Instead, her musical soul spoke through her poetry. S  
 he took one pencil in each of her badly deformed hands.  
 sing the eraser end she would slowly type the words,  
 the joy of them outweighing the pain of her efforts.  
 Her words, a joyous expression of the wonders of life,  
 as seen by a singing soul that was touched by the Master's Hand.

One time as a friend turned to leave her home,  
 Myra patted the arm of her wheel chair and said,  
 "I thank God for this!"  
 Imagine being grateful for a wheelchair!  
 But her talent lay undiscovered prior to her wheel chair days. Rather than  
 becoming bitter,  
 she chose to let her handicap make her better,  
 and a wonderful new door opened for her.

