



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily
Sunday, March 29, 2020

Fifth Sunday of Lent - Year A (Jn 11:1-45)

What are your sufferings?

These difficult times bring suffering. What are your sufferings?

When a loved one dies, we suffer, and these days, people are suffering such a loss, plus they are grieving the loss of a loved one at a time when the opportunity to gather as a group to mourn or pray publicly is extremely restricted.

This in itself becomes a new source of suffering. It is as though someone, at the moment he or she departed from this world, did so unknown to anyone and completely unnoticed.

However, God is always near to us, even in death. Indeed, God is never closer to someone than at the moment of his/her death. And God is never closer to us than when we lose some-one we love.

There are also other sources of suffering arising from the insecurity in which we now find ourselves. Suffering felt while awaiting test results: Are we infected or not? Suffering brought on by worrying about family members who could be affected by this virus. Suffering associated with economic insecurity: Will I lose my job? Maybe it already happened or is about to happen. Will I receive the help that I need to make it through this? And there are other forms of suffering

that are part of daily life but now merge together as we live through this pandemic.

Is it possible to move forward, to deal with suffering and still have hope?

When we hear Jesus speak in today's reading from the Gospel of John, He says: "I am the resurrection and the life." He knows who He is: He is the Lord. He is the Lord who is life. He is the Lord who gives life, and He is the resurrection and the life. Yet, when Jesus reaches Lazarus's tomb, He suffers the loss of his friend. He weeps, experiencing the depths of our humanity. He does not leave our humanity behind, but He experiences every aspect of it, including the experience of suffering. He draws closer to us in our suffering.

From whatever you are suffering today, share it with the Lord. The Lord truly draws closer to us when we are beset by suffering. He willingly suffered and embraced suffering so as to accompany us in our fears and suffering. He could have ignored his own pain. He could have said that it does not matter. He could have said that the resurrection will make this just passing matter. No, suffering is real; suffering is part of our heart and soul, our body and spirit. The suffering we're experiencing is real and it's affecting us. We are suffering now, in one way or another. And Jesus comes and holds us close throughout our suffering.

But at the same time, suffering does not have the final word. When beleaguered by suffering, it feels as if suffering will have the final word. When we live in uncertainty, we feel as if insecurity will have the final word. When we are confronted with death, we feel as if death will have the final word. But when we are suffering, vulnerable, confronted with sickness and death, does

suffering, disease or death have the final word? Jesus Christ, through his power and his resurrection, came to demonstrate, proclaim and reveal that this is not so, because life itself will have the final word. Suffering is part of human life, but life, everlasting life is the final word, will have and has the final word. Love! Love between us, love shared within the family, love expressed as solidarity with others, this love will have the final word!

Suffering afflicts us in many different ways. Think of hockey, where there is almost always someone on the team who gets hurt! The important thing is that not everyone gets hurt at the same time. That is why hockey players must support each other. The injured person carries the burden of injury, and the person who is not injured must help to carry the team.

Now, this becomes the question: in these difficult times, when suffering seems so prevalent, how can we move forward in solidarity, both as a society and as families? Solidarity is always part of living, but the situation in which we are now living calls us to go further, even much further. Although we are in physical-distancing mode, more than ever, we need to be together in another way rather than “as it used to be,” as people say today.

Life has not stopped! Physical distancing is indispensable, and now it is of the utmost importance. We must respect the confinement measures. Doing so is a form of social solidarity. Out of solidarity, we respect the physical distancing and other confinement and quarantine regulations that we are asked to follow. But life does not end with these measures! Life continues in a different way. How will we maintain personal relationships with one another? How will we continue to be united? Well, pick up the phone and call those you know. Call someone each day. Call at least one person every day. If you know someone who is alone or if you are alone yourself, make sure to reach out. If you are familiar with social media, use it; many are doing so. Listen to the radio! Radio is accessible 24/7; it's a very familiar means of communication that offers good company. At one time, only radio existed but it brought the whole community together. Television is another way to experience community solidarity. There are numerous other ways to connect socially. Through these means, we are reminded that we are thinking of one another, that we are praying for one another. Let us not forget one another.

This Sunday, at noon, the church bells will ring for 10 minutes all across Quebec in order to send a message of hope! This message of hope is aimed at the heart, since suffering possesses power to damage the heart. It is somewhat like the scientific laws regarding the expansion of a gas. We learned in school that gas couldn't be confined in only one side of the room. Wherever gas exists, it spreads throughout the whole room. When suffering invades our heart, it cannot be contained in only one side of one ventricle, no matter how hard we try to do so. Suffering spreads and tends to overwhelm the heart. For that reason, solidarity is so important. Let people know that they are not alone in their suffering. So if we grow in solidarity, if we find new ways to be united, we can say later that it was a struggle, there was suffering, but we grew stronger together. When this happens, then goodness will rise out of crisis, from this pandemic, from this menace that now weighs so heavily on all of humanity.

Jesus Christ himself invites us to be united in solidarity by the mere fact that He himself became one of us, in solidarity with each of us. We should never forget Jesus' powerful words when seeking ways to meet Jesus. Yes, we meet Him in prayer! Yes, we meet Him through the Bible! Yes, we meet Him through the sacraments, the Eucharist. But then, there is also the person who is suffering. This is a way to meet Jesus! This road leads to an encounter with Jesus.

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Each time that we lend a hand to someone who suffers deeply, we lend a hand to Jesus. Each time that we engage in a conversation with someone who is suffering, we converse with Jesus.

If you are longing for Jesus, suffering because there is no public celebration of Mass, if you long for his physical presence, if you long to receive Communion, beyond the spiritual communion

always open to believers, then remember that when we are in a communion with someone who suffers, then we meet Jesus.

Therefore, during these difficult days, we are learning to form stronger bonds between us, so that solidarity will grow between us and that all of us will grow in solidarity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

† Christian Lépine
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