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Victory Through Suffering

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Nike, the shoe company, not the ancient Greek goddess, famously said, “Just Do It.” But why is the company called “Nike,” and what does the word mean? *Nikê* is the Greek goddess of victory in war – and life. Battles bring victory, and she brought victory to Zeus, supporting him in his wars. Taking note, Nike became the shoe company that brings victory to athletes.

St. Paul, too, noted this mythology and reordered it to Christ: “In all these things we are more than conquerors (*hyper-nikomen*) through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37–38) Victory is ours because Christ intercedes, not Nike. **Jesus is the one true God. He gives us victory not in mythical battles, but real, spiritual battles with Principalities and Powers, evil spirits, trying to conquer us through temptation and suffering.**

Suffering is a profound problem and breaks many people. Suffering people weaken and, in their weakness, forsake the fullness of life. They give in to temptations, trials, and tragedy. In the abyss of suffering, despair arises, and sin suffocates hope. Yet St. Paul, a man who suffered intensely while living and preaching the Gospel, replies: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35)

Moses warned of these seven woes, telling the Israelites that if they broke the covenant with God, these curses would occur, not as a condemnation but as a correction. Corrections cause suffering, but the sufferings are curative, not harmful. Yet many see suffering as vengeful, criticizing God, saying that He causes suffering and cannot, therefore, be all-loving and all-good.

In contrast, **the wise see suffering as God's way to stop people from sinning and losing their lives.** Sin destroys us. It separates us from Christ, as St. Paul tells us, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:21)

What things? "Immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." (Galatians 5:18–21)

Sin, not suffering, separates us from God. Separated from Him, the spiritual battle is lost (though the larger war is not yet over). **Sin impedes the Holy Spirit from working in our lives. God, however, intervenes and sends His Son.** In His death (ironically) and resurrection, Jesus is victorious. He defeats the Powers and Principalities, and restores us to life with his grace.

Grace, partaking in God's life, changes sins into victory and sufferings into triumph. Any victory costs. It entails suffering, but the suffering we endure has a purpose. It is not worthless. In fact, St. James tells us, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

The Last Supper mosaic [Monreale Cathedral, Palermo, Sicily]

Yet many people see their sufferings as meaningless. They live in the here and now, not in the eternal hereafter. St. John Paul knew this. In his great work *Salvifici doloris*, he writes:

Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way. (§ 2)

That call asks us to go beyond our present self and discover the great experience of encountering God. Through suffering, Christ's passion, death, and resurrection become alive in us. And **through our own cross, we conform our wills to the Father's as did Jesus. In other words, suffering embraced saves.**

Instead of seeing suffering as a way to God's victory, many reject God's will, thinking suffering is foolish. Christ dismisses that thinking, telling us to take up our cross daily and follow Him.

Following Jesus, at first, leads us into the desert. Alone, hungry, and lost, Jesus speaks to us. He gives us Himself not just in words and miracles, which many, while He was still on earth, came out to see. But the wonder Jesus wanted to give is communion with Him. Giving us His body, blood, soul, and divinity. In the Breaking of the Bread, we commune with Him and have true victory.

Hunger is a longing not only for food, but also for life. Knowing our struggles with sin and death, Jesus feeds us with Living Bread, Himself. He does not perish but offers eternal life. In the miracle of Feeding the Five Thousand, Jesus takes the bread, blesses, breaks, and gives it to the people. During the Last Supper, He does the same. He takes bread, blesses, breaks, and gives it to his disciples, declaring: This is my body and blood of the New Covenant.

What He did at the Last Supper is what we do at Mass. We enter into communion with the divine to break free from sins and their cause, Satan and the Powers and Principalities. It's there that we have victory over both.

Pope Benedict affirmed this in *Sacramentum caritatis*:

The institution of the Eucharist demonstrates how Jesus' death, for all its violence and absurdity, became in him a supreme act of love and mankind's definitive deliverance from evil.

Christ's love is radical. It destroys the powers of evil, Lucifer, and his fallen comrades. It conquers sin through forgiveness and defeats death by the offering of His life.

Hence, Jesus is truly the God Who triumphs. He destroys death and restores life in one single act, his greatest miracle. All his other miracles foreshadowed this miracle, which reveals that Jesus is not a false goddess like Nikê, but the true God of heaven and earth, Who brings total victory: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us." (Ephesians 1:6–8)

Fr Thomas Kuffel born in Milwaukee, WI ,was ordained in 1989, and served some 25 years as a priest in the Diocese of Lincoln, NE. Subsequently, he served for six years as a missionary priest for Fairbanks, AK. After this assignment he asked to work in the Archdiocese of Denver and currently serves in rural Colorado taking care of two parishes.

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