

“I love you man” were the last words my Grannie Reaves said to me. I love you too Grannie. My Grannie was born in 1920 and grew up during the depression. She never had very much but was always willing to share what she did have. She spent her life working at the mill and at a glass factory. She was a widow from the age of 48 and she spent the next 24 years taking care of herself, the house, the yard, and whatever else needed to be done. She was always willing to do anything for me. She would always give me \$10-20 when I was leaving. Back then, that was a good amount of money! As I grew older, I would sneak it back into her purse. My Grannie knew sacrifice. She also knew what it meant to suffer when she died of brain cancer in 1992.

My Grandmother Poythress was also an amazing lady and let me tell you she made the best lima beans on the planet. From the time she was 9 until about 11 years old, she would stay with an elderly woman at night to help pay the rent on the house. She had to do this because her father was sick. She also helped take care of her younger sister, Poodle, who had Polio from the age of 6 months. My Grandmother Poythress was a dedicated wife, mother and grandmother. My Grandmother Poythress knew sacrifice. She also knew what it meant to suffer...dying under very difficult circumstances.

Cora was a beautiful lady I met at York Convalescent. She was essentially bed-ridden. She passed a way about one year ago. Every time I would bring her the Eucharist, she always remembered my name and she was so happy to see me. Even in her condition, what struck me about her was her positive attitude. She always prayed for others in her family and was in touch with what was going on in their lives. She suffered in her earthly life, but I knew how much she loved and trusted in God. Cora knew sacrifice and she knew what it meant to suffer.

Maximillian Kolbe was a Franciscan Friar in the first part of the 20th century. During WW II, he hid thousands of Jews and was very vocal against Nazi Germany. He ended up in the German prison camp in Auschwitz. While there, men were chosen to face death by starvation to warn against escapes. While he was not chosen, he volunteered to take the place of a man with a family. During this time, he led prayers to our Lady Mary and he was the last to remain alive. After two weeks of dehydration and starvation, they killed him by lethal injection. Maximilian Kolbe knew about sacrifice and suffering.

Today is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Sorrows. From early on, Mary dedicated her life from the moment of her YES. Through many ups and downs Mary remained steadfast...even as her Son hung on a cross. Mary knew about sacrifice and suffering.

The readings from today connect three very important elements. Works, sacrifice, and suffering. In the second reading, James states that faith must be accompanied by works. What do we mean by works? There are works that accomplish tasks or “get things done” but I would submit to you that works in this case are affirmative responses to God’s call in us that grow the kingdom of God, that draw people closer to Christ, that serves the need of our church and the community. Our ability to do works starts with one attribute that describes the four people I mentioned earlier – self...less...ness. In all cases, they were not thinking about themselves in how they lived their lives, they were thinking about others. And when we begin to do this, the transformative power of God is revealed through what we do...through WHO we are – not just for others, but in our own lives. But to perform works, requires sacrifice.

Sacrifice comes in many forms. There is sacrifice to take care of a parent that is dying...there is sacrifice to spend time with a friend who needs our help...there is sacrifice in not getting the job offer we thought we should have...there is sacrifice in the sacrament of marriage...there is sacrifice in the sacrament of reconciliation...there is sacrifice in receiving the Eucharist...not just Jesus, but us too! Sacrifice is the

recognition that God did not place us on the earth so we could do what we want to. God placed us here so we could give our lives away to others...to love God and love our neighbor. True love is willing the good of the other for the other wanting nothing in return. Sacrifice IS Love. And with most sacrifices there is some sort of suffering that goes along with it. Let me share a few examples.

How often do we feel like the suffering servant found in our first reading from Isaiah today...where we are being treated unfairly or feel wounded or frustrated and like nothing is going our way? We are called to turn the other cheek and to trust and rely on God. I recently was dealing with someone who is our inspector for a project in another State. To make a long story short, he went out of his way to make things difficult. Upon hearing this while driving, I became quite upset...a form of suffering. Immediately, I realized that my reaction...all by myself in the car...was not who God is calling me to be. My ego and pride wanted to fight back. I needed to sacrifice my will, turn the other cheek. I proceeded to deal with the situation in a professional manner understanding that all I can do is the right thing...to understand things will work out no matter what...I trusted in God to take care of the bigger picture related to this project. Bottom line, I found peace and healing in conforming my will to the will of God!

Another example is my wife, Debbie. She spent the better part of 15 months helping attend to her dad who was suffering from a terminal illness in Florida. She had to give up her normal plan and agenda to make this trip one week at a time each month. The sacrifice here is clear but where is the suffering? The suffering comes in giving up all the other things going on in her life, in not having control over her dad's health knowing he is going to die...in doing what has to be done which is the will of God. But there is redemption in this suffering knowing that her Dad, who became Catholic at 71 years old, found his way home...there is redemption in life coming full circle where we have the opportunity to take care of and be with our parents.

The sacrament of marriage is another area of sacrifice that can often involve suffering. For richer or poorer, sickness and health...til death do we part. Marriages are not 50/50. They are not partnerships. Marriages are 100/100...it is a covenant...unbreakable because God is at the very center. Marriage calls us to fully give of ourselves according to God's will to our spouse. I suffer in my marriage when I am selfish. Here is the reality...If I love my wife completely, should I not be willing to give myself to her like Christ gave Himself to the Church? I can tell you that over the course of 30 years I am learning there is grace in fully giving of myself...it intensifies everything good in our relationship.

The sacrament of reconciliation requires sacrifice and suffering as well. We have to take a good, hard look at ourselves and how we are living and responding to our baptismal call. We have to sacrifice our pride. There is suffering of conscience going on when I prepare for confession. I know I need to get straight with God. That suffering of conscience is what leads me to the sacrament. There is great grace in receiving the sacrament of reconciliation because God's redemptive suffering on the cross is greater than my sins.

The sacrament of the Eucharist calls us to become what we receive...we are called to be sacrament to the world...an outward sign of God's love to the world. This means we should understand God is present throughout the day and we should make Him present to others. We are called to imitate Christ in a world that does not want Him. And this brings about suffering depending on our environment.

Just like Jesus, we suffer because of our humanity. In the Gospel today, Jesus told Peter he would suffer. Peter did not want to hear it...this is not how it should be. Jesus knew what needed to be done and so he told Peter – get behind me Satan. Make no mistake about it...the devil wants us to choose the easy path, to do what makes us comfortable. When times get tough, he wants us to turn away from God. There are countless moments throughout the day where God is asking us to pick up our cross, some small and some big, and follow Him...to do His will. He is asking us to be the instrument of His grace and love to the world...In that moment, He is asking you “Who do you say I am?” How we respond is the answer to this question. In the difficulties of life, in the suffering, especially the suffering currently going on in the Church, Jesus is asking “Who do you say

I am?”. We must not walk away or turn away. We must cling to the One whose suffering brings about redemption...we must cling to Jesus knowing that His love brings about our faith, His love brings about our works, His love brings about our sacrifice, and His love pours out grace in our suffering.

As we prepare to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, as He is placed into our hands...He is asking “Who do you say I am?”