

## God's Gold

Would you like to escape the sufferings that you are presently enduring, whether they are physical or emotional, whether they will be brief or long lasting? Virtually all of us would trade in our sufferings given the choice. The bad news is that we will never be able to escape suffering; it is part of the human condition. But there is, however, good news: suffering has value and purpose.

Because of our impatient hearts, we tend to look at suffering as a punishment from God or as sign that he does not care what happens to us. However, our Catholic faith tells us that this is not the case. Regarding suffering, the author of the book of Wisdom writes: "Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them..." A goldsmith subjects gold to high temperatures by placing it in the furnace in order to separate the dirt, rock, and other elements that might be mingled with it. In this way, the high temperatures purify the gold, and once gold is in its pure form, it is extremely malleable and the goldsmith can form the gold into any shape he wishes. In the same way that the goldsmith purifies and makes more malleable the gold with which he diligently works, so it is that God transforms us into vessels of love for Him.

God allows us to be subjected to the "furnace" of suffering because only by suffering are we purified from sin. The pain and fear that we experience from suffering makes us realize just how dependent we are on Him. We cling to God as a frightened child clings to her/his mother. When we are driven into God's arms, we can more clearly see His face and "feel" the beating of His heart; we begin to be transformed, purified. Being in God's loving and purifying embrace, we begin to trust and give ourselves completely over to Him: we become more malleable in His hands, so that He can shape and mold us into what He wills.

Unfortunately, many suffer and never reap the spiritual benefits. Instead of turning to God, they turn to creaturely things or they shake their fists at God for allowing the bad to happen. The fires of suffering consume rather than purify these souls, and they become bitter and rigid, unreceptive to God's purifying action. Depending only on ourselves and our own abilities to cope, we will fall into this kind of senseless suffering. And so it was that God Himself took on the human condition, and suffered as we suffer, to show us the way.

When Jesus was mocked, scourged, spat upon, reviled, and crucified, He humbly offered it to the Father, and He did so because of his limitless love for the Father: "Not my will but yours be done." Yet Jesus' suffering was not for the sake of suffering: it was to culminate in His victory over death. He was glorified only after he endured the agony of the cross. Our Eucharistic Jesus, the same Jesus who humbly offered His sufferings out of infinite love for the Father and was glorified because of His sufferings, helps us to see the great purpose of our sufferings and to endure them in a way that is beneficial for our souls and pleasing to God. The Eucharist enlightens the mind to the meaning of suffering, spurs the soul to heroic suffering, fans the heart's flame of love for God, and gives hope to those suffering.

When we are faced with suffering, we must remind ourselves that we are called to be the gold in God's hands. God loves us too much to leave us the way we are, and so uses suffering to draw us closer to Him. In suffering, let us not resist the fatherly pull of God. Our Eucharistic Lord will show us the way.

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