



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

18 March 2019, 9:42 AM

Summary reflection 6: How can suffering be good?

The following is a summary reflection of the sixth talk given by Father Raniero Cantalamessa to the US bishops during their 2019 retreat:

We begin by being with Jesus, being taught by him, and following his lead, even when Jesus leads us into the Passion of Gethsemane.

In 1997 I was sent to work in one of the Vatican offices. I didn't want to go. And after only a few months, I didn't want to stay.

I felt that I was out of my depth intellectually, as well as being able to understand and make myself understood in the Italian language.

As a consequence of my shortcomings, I was often corrected, and passed over when assignments were handed out; it was humiliating to my sinful pride.

I concluded that I was a burden to the Vatican, and working there was a burden to me. So, I asked my bishop to call me back to the diocese. Why prolong everyone's agony?

In response, he told me to stay for the agreed-upon number of years. But when time was up, he extended my stay there even longer, in spite of my asking to be recalled.

That was a dark time for me. I prayed: God, if I must stay, please give me the knowledge of theology and Italian so I can do the work. Nothing.

I was in my own agony in the garden, struggling to fit my will to the mystery of God's will, and to understand the whys and wherefores of it all.

My agony doesn't seem like much when you consider what others have to endure. But then, God never tests us beyond our limit, and I am a spiritual wimp.

I was saved by the counsel of Father Kentenich, the founder of Schoenstatt, which inspired a mantra that I would repeatedly repeat to myself until my soul became calm:

Hand of God, out of love, for my need.

Nothing happens outside of God's Providence, and what the Father permits is good, given by a loving Father to children that he loves.

How can suffering be good? That was fodder for much meditation, which produced the following possible explanations. See if any of them resonate with your experience:

- It provides a point of identity with Jesus, who suffered, even though innocent
- It is an opportunity to join our sufferings to Christ's cross for the benefit of others
- It opens our eyes to other people who suffer, and makes us compassionate to them
- It is a wake-up call, sometimes to repent, or to start really living each moment
- It toughens us up to survive and thrive through the rigors of life
- It makes us comfortable with mystery – there isn't always an answer for everything

Avoid suffering by all means. Use acceptable means to be rid of it. But if neither of those are possible, then follow Jesus into the Passion of Gethsemane, and with God's help endure it, trying to see the hand of God, out of love, for your need.

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque