



Thoughts on the Journey

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Suffering. It's such a harsh word. Most of us would do everything to avoid it, for ourselves and for those we love. As people, living out the human condition we often see no purpose in suffering. As Christian Catholics, we are often criticized and accused of being too occupied with suffering. Let's face it, no one wants to suffer themselves. When we love someone the last thing we want to witness is their suffering. Prior to being a 'mom', I cannot remember ever having intentionally cooperated in someone's suffering. However, when my vocation as a mother began, that changed.

My first experience with consenting to someone else's suffering, was when my children were infants. Taking them to the doctor for follow-up visits usually meant vaccinations. I remember looking for an excuse or some scientific reason for them not to be inoculated (they were out there), but most of the evidence pointed in favor of getting the shots that would prevent them from getting certain life-threatening diseases. I remember the thrust of pain when I stood and witnessed a needle penetrating their little arms and legs and the cries and screams that followed. Those vaccinations were just the beginning; they prepared me for future suffering.

I learned early on, as their mother, their advocate, their teacher, their mentor, their protector, that I had to consistently put their best interest and greater good ahead of my own. That involves angst and suffering. It involves risk and the dread of watching their suffering, when they didn't understand.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus began to reveal to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer greatly at the hands of the scribes, the elders, and the chief priests. Peter immediately rebuked Jesus saying that it just shouldn't happen. Jesus responded to Peter,

“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

Jesus then said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” He also told them that whoever wishes to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it. He presented them with the question, “what profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

In Peter's encounter with Jesus, it begs the question, was he more concerned about how Jesus' suffering would affect him or how it would affect Jesus? Sometimes it is far easier to avoid our own pain and discomfort by not doing the difficult thing, by choosing to run from what needs to be done for the good of another. We may fool ourselves in believing that our avoidance of doing the tough thing is for someone else's benefit, when it is really for our own. Jesus' clear message is that suffering is part of being his disciple. Regardless of our vocation in life, we will be faced with difficult decisions: choices that involve choosing God's way or the world's way. Are you willing to deny yourself to follow Christ? Are you willing to pick up your cross? Are you willing to suffer?