

Holy Trinity Catholic Church
RCIA Class Transcript
The Anointing of the Sick and Suffering
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With tonight's topic, we're going to be finishing up the sacraments. We're going to be talking about what's called the Sacrament of the *Anointing of the Sick*. Before Vatican II, it had a different title; it was called *Extreme Unction*. The word "unction" comes from the Latin word meaning "to be anointed." "Extreme" meant "last anointing", or, when a person was seriously ill, they could be anointed. The Anointing of the Sick is the last sacrament that we're going to be talking about. The oil that is used for the Anointing of the Sick is blessed by the Bishop on Holy Thursday. It's the same day that he also blesses the other oils.

There are three main oils that we use in the Catholic Church. One is the *Oil of Salvation*. The second is the *Oil of the Sick*. The third is the *Oil of Sacred Chrism*. You may remember when we talked about Confirmation, that chrism is what you're anointed with when you're confirmed. When a baby's baptized, those of you who have been a baptismal ceremony might remember that, right before the baptism, there's an anointing with the Oil of Salvation. This is also called the *Oil of Catechumen*, which means they're just about to become Christians, and members of the Church. This anointing is done right here at the upper part of the chest, the lower part of the neck. You might remember that; that's the Oil of Salvation.

After we baptize the baby, then we anoint the child on the top of the head, the crown of the head, with the Oil of Chrism. Chrism is the mixture of oil and perfume. All three of these are blessed by the Bishop on Holy Thursday, two days before Easter.

What's used in the Anointing of the Sick is this oil right here, the Oil for the Infirm, or the Oil for the Sick. The oil has to be blessed by the Bishop. The Anointing is done by a priest; a deacon cannot do the Anointing of the Sick. Only a priest or a Bishop can administer the Anointing of the Sick. Through the prayer of the priest, the sacrament gives health and strength, first of all, to the soul. Primarily, it's to heal the soul. Sometimes it even brings physical health to the body. If it would be for the greater benefit of the person's soul, God sometimes does heal a person physically, if it would be to their spiritual betterment. This Anointing is done when a person has a serious illness, or is in danger of death, either from sickness, accident, or old age.

We know that the Lord, during His life, spent a great deal of time with the sick. One of the most important parts of His ministry was to administer to those who were crippled; those who were blind; those who had leprosy; and the Lord cured them. The Lord showed a great compassion for the sick and the suffering. It says

in Matthew, Chapter 4, "The Lord went about doing good, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people." In Luke, Chapter 4, it says, "When the sun was setting, all who were sick with various diseases, brought them to Him, and He laid hands on each of them, and He cured them." We also know in Mark, Chapter 6, it says, "When our Lord first sent out the Apostles, they cast out many devils, anointed people with oil, and healed them." The idea of the Anointing of the Sick with oil is found right in the New Testament. It's found in Mark, Chapter 6, Verse 13.

The clearest indication of this sacrament in the New Testament is the Letter of James, Chapter 5, Verse 14. St. James writes, "Is any one of you sick? Let them send for the priests of the Church; let the priest pray over them, anointing them with oil in the Name of the Lord. The prayer of Faith will save the sick person. The Lord will raise them up. If they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them."

Remember, all the sacraments were initiated by Christ. We see here that clearly, even in the New Testament, that the Anointing of the Sick with oil was a common practice in the early Church. It makes sense that there would be a sacrament to help the sick. Remember, all the seven sacraments help different aspects of our life. For example, Baptism gives us new life and spiritual birth. The Eucharist is our food. In Confession, when we stray and are wounded spiritually, we come back, and have our sins forgiven. When we grow into adulthood, this occurs through the Sacrament of Confirmation. When we get sick, and are nearing death, we could be anointed with this holy oil as well. It's just a wonderful sacrament; it's one of the best reasons to be Catholic, is to have this Anointing of the Sick. That really is a tremendous blessing.

I just did a funeral today of one of our parishioners, and I anointed him before his death. I had been visiting him over the last month or two. He was dying of cancer. When you anoint somebody, they really get a lot more peace, and a lot more strength to carry their illnesses with joy, courage, and acceptance. I had just been with the family on Friday, and he died on Sunday morning. He was more or less under medication. He was sleeping, and was somewhat out of it because of the medication. I anointed him and gave him all the blessings. A few moments later he opened his eyes, and was so alert, and so conscious, that he grasped my hand and held it. He was so grateful to have me kneel by his bedside, and his family was around; his wife of 50 years was there, and the five children were there. It was a beautiful experience. We prayed together. I anointed him. You could really see that the Anointing gave him great comfort. It is definitely one of the great blessings of being a Catholic, is to receive this Anointing of the Sick.

In fact, many of you probably have seen one of these crosses. On the cross, it has the image of the Sacred Heart of Christ, the Blessed Mother, the Miraculous Medal, a picture of St. Joseph, and St. Christopher. On the back it says, "I am a

Catholic. In case of emergency, please call a priest.” This is good, because let’s say you’re on the side of the road, in a car accident, and they see this. They could call a priest to come to administer that. I’m trying to find one that says, “I am a priest. Please call a Bishop,” but nobody’s made those yet; I’m still working on trying to get one of those! It is great comfort to the family to have the loved one receive the Anointing of the Sick. I know, for example, in this man’s case, I visited his wife for a couple of years, and took her Communion. We anointed her. I think that was a blessing in her life as well.

The Lord gives us this sacrament. In the old days, before Vatican II, the priest used to anoint the different senses. He would anoint the eyes, the ears, the hands, the feet, and the lips. Now, when the person is anointed, they just do the anointing of the forehead, and then the palms of the hands. The priest will say a prayer. It’s a prayer like, “May the grace of the Holy Spirit help you...”, something like that. Then the priest anoints the forehead, and then he anoints the palms of the hands. The only time he wouldn’t anoint the palms of the hands is if he’s anointing a priest. Since a priest was already consecrated, his hands were consecrated at his ordination; the priest does not get the palms of his hands anointed, if the priest is sick or dying. He actually turns his hands over, and the priest anoints the back of his hands. Everybody else has the palms of their hands anointed when they’re sick.

Who should receive this anointing? Any Catholic that has reached the *Age of Reason*, which is about the age of seven or eight. If somebody’s below that age, they’re normally not anointed. It’s only for those that have reached the Age of Reason, and who are in danger of death, have a serious illness, or advanced in age, or might be in an accident, or somebody that might be going into surgery. If somebody was going to be going into a serious surgery, maybe they’re going to be put under anesthesia, they could be anointed if they would like to be.

The primary purpose of this sacrament is to restore the soul, to heal the soul, which is weakened by sin and temptation. The sacrament should be received as soon as a person is aware of a serious illness. You shouldn’t wait until just being on the brink of death, and call in the priest to anoint the person. It’s best if the person is anointed early in the illness. The person normally would only be anointed once during the same illness. If the illness grew much worse, they could be anointed again. Or, if the person got better, then fell back into the same illness or a different illness, they could be anointed as well.

One of the things I’ve found, especially dealing with some of the elderly people, is that they think that if they get anointed, they’re a goner. That’s something we have to try to change the mindset about. Sometimes I walk into the hospital room, and someone says, “No, don’t come in here! Don’t anoint me!” They think that if you get anointed, you’re going to die. That’s not what it means. Younger people don’t have that mentality, but some of the elderly Italian grandmothers that I visit in the hospital say, “Don’t send for the priest, because then I’m a

goner!" As long as you know it doesn't work like that. The Anointing does not mean that you're going to die; it's done in a serious illness, or in danger of death. It's really for healing – healing of the soul, giving peace of mind, as well as sometimes a person's body is healed.

To receive the sacrament, the person should be in the *State of Grace*; if they're conscious, they would go to Confession, and then they receive the Anointing of the Sick. If they've already slipped into a coma, they can still be anointed. Even if they're not conscious, they could still be anointed. Their sins would be forgiven if they're anointed, as long as they had the right disposition of heart before they slipped into the coma. If they had at least some sorrow for their sins, then this anointing would absolve them of all their sins. That's why it's good to not put off the Anointing too late. It's better to be anointed while a person is conscious, and is able to make their Confession. That would be the benefit.

What are the effects of the sacrament? First of all, it increases *Sanctifying Grace* within the soul. It strengthens; it heals; it helps the soul. It also brings comfort during times of sickness, and strength against temptation, because the Evil One, the Devil, is very active on people's deathbeds. He knows that's one of his last chances to steal their soul, to lead them away from God. That's why it's important, on a person's deathbed, to call for the priest, and to have Holy Water there, to have a Crucifix and the Rosary, and the other sacramentals of the Church; because the Evil One, the Devil, is very alive and active. As the Bible says, "The Devil is like a prowling lion, looking for someone to devour." That's why we need these sacraments of the Church, and the grace of Christ, to be able to resist his temptations on our deathbed. That's why the Rosary is so important, and the Hail Mary, because every time we say the Hail Mary, we say, "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." Every Rosary you say is 50 prayers you're storing up for yourself at the hour of your death. That's why the Rosary is so powerful.

The Anointing also prepares our soul for Heaven. It remits all venial sins; it wipes away all smaller sins, cleanses the soul from the effects of sin, as well as what's called the *Temporal Punishment* due to sin. We talked a little about this before, when we used the analogy of the hammer and the nail. If I drove the nail into this pulpit, it now represents the sin. Confession pulls out the nail, but what's left is the wounded nature, the wounded soul. The penance that the priest gives helps to fill that up, but the Anointing does that as well. The Anointing heals those wounds in the person's soul. That's why it's so important to be anointed.

It says it removes venial sins, and unforgiven mortal sins that one was unable to confess, if he at least has some sorrow for that sin. It also removes the remains, or the effects of sin: the weakness of the will, and evil inclinations which are the results of past sins. Sometimes, when a person is anointed, the health of their body is restored. It's as when it is for the good of the soul. So, only God knows.

Sometimes, when people are anointed, they recover; sometimes they don't – it's really up to the Lord.

It says, "When does Anointing of the Sick take away mortal sin?" The sacrament takes away mortal sin when the sick person is unconscious, or otherwise unaware that he is not properly disposed, but has made an act of some contrition. It doesn't have to be Perfect Contrition, but as long as it's some contrition, then the Anointing would take away even mortal sins/serious sins.

Sometimes, you'll hear all this called the *Last Rites*. A *rite* is a ceremony. The Last Rites usually would include three things:

- Confession, if the person is conscious
- Communion, if they're able. If somebody is in a coma they wouldn't be able to receive Communion.
- Anointing

The person, let's say, might be in the hospital, but he might be in their home. You should call for the priest. If the person is conscious, hopefully they would make a good Confession. We would give them Holy Communion, if they were able to receive, and then give them the Anointing of the Sick. When the priest visits, if he comes to the home it's a good idea to have a little table set up with a white cloth on it; the priest then places the *pyx* (which is the little container that holds the Blessed Sacrament) on it. Sometimes you could have a candle (if the person's on oxygen, then you wouldn't want to light the candle). The priest would place the Blessed Sacrament there. He would then do the blessings. Sometimes it's a good idea to have a little glass of water, in case the sick person receiving Communion needs a little sip of water to help receive Communion. It's also a good idea to have a Crucifix there as well, and some Holy Water. You can actually get what's called a *Mass Kit*, or a *Sick Call Set*. It usually comes inside a Crucifix. It opens up, and inside are holders for the candles, a little bottle of Holy Water, and a white cloth. That's a nice thing to do, upon the arrival of the priest.

In the old days, it was a beautiful tradition that, when the priest arrived at the house, to bring Communion, the person would meet them at the door with a lighted candle. Normally, though, that's not seen that often anymore, but it still is a very beautiful tradition.

We should spend a moment on Christian funerals. I just did one today, as I mentioned. The funeral ceremonies in the Catholic Church are very beautiful. One of the things that you'll see in the funeral ceremonies is that the priest can wear different colored vestments. He can either wear the white vestment, or he can wear black vestments, that are still around, or there are purple vestments, too, – any of those three colors are acceptable for a funeral.

Normally, what happens for *Catholic funerals* is that the funeral home is contacted. The night before the *funeral Mass*, you'd have what's called a *Wake*

Service, or a *Visitation*, where sometimes the person's body would be laid out in their finest suit. Hopefully, if the person was Catholic, there might be a pair of Rosary beads in their hands. The people come, and they usually pray the Rosary that night, during the Visitation, or the priest could come and do a *Prayer Service*. The next day would be the funeral Mass.

Some of the things that you'll see at the Mass are first, they'll place a *Pall* over the casket. That's the long white cloth that drapes over the casket. What's interesting is that the same thing you'll see at a baptism, you will also see at the funeral, because some of these same Traditions are there when we become Christians. As we check out of this world into the next world, some of these same images are there as well. When a baby is baptized, we place the white baptismal garment over the child; the white garment of the pall is placed over the casket as well. The white pall reminds us of the baptismal garment they received; it meant they became a Child of God at their Baptism.

Also, at the Baptism, there's the *Baptismal Candle* that's lit. If you take a look right behind you, is the *Easter Candle*. That's called the *Paschal Candle*. So, in Baptism, you have the lighting of the candle, and the same thing at the Christian Mass, the large candle is right in the front of the altar. Another thing that's used, that's the same at a Baptism, is Holy Water. At the Baptism, the baby has the water poured over them, and in the funeral Mass, the casket is sprinkled with Holy Water. These are some of the same things you'll see, so the Church embraces us, I guess you could say, from the womb to the tomb, from the beginning of life (Baptism), all the way until the end of life, when the person is sent off to eternal life with God in Heaven. There are a lot of beautiful, rich traditions that the Church has at the funeral Mass.

Sometimes, the case comes up, "What about *cremation*? Is cremation allowed in the Catholic Church?" In the old days, the Church had to forbid cremation because, what was happening was, that back at the time of the French Revolution, many of the French atheists wanted to be cremated, so that God could not resurrect their body on the Last Day. The Church had to say no, it was wrong to be cremated. But, as time went on, people did not get cremated for anti-religious reasons. They got cremated because it was less expensive, or less of a burden on the family. In 1983, the new Code of Canon Law came out, and it said, "Yes, Catholics are allowed to be cremated, provided that they are not doing it for anti-religious reasons." The only time a person should not be cremated is if they say, "Well, I don't want God to resurrect my body on the Last Day, so I want to be cremated." That would not be acceptable. Again, everybody who gets cremated now is not doing it for anti-religious reasons. They're doing it for convenience, or the expense is less, etc. As long as somebody doesn't deny the Resurrection, they're allowed to be cremated.

The ashes should not just be sprinkled on your favorite hole of your favorite golf course, or sprinkled in the infield of your favorite stadium. The ashes, even if

they're cremated, should still be buried. They should still be placed in a sacred place, in a mausoleum, or at the cemetery, because the body is still sacred. It's true that God could still resurrect the body, even if the ashes were all over Lake Erie. That's fine; God could still do that, but the Church says that the person's remains are sacred and holy, and should be kept in an individual location, like a grave or a cemetery.

Many Catholics are buried in a Catholic cemetery. In this area, there are not that many Catholic cemeteries. Any cemetery is fine. At the funeral ceremony, at the burial, the priest blesses the grave with Holy Water. That's what I did today, at Quantico, this afternoon. We blessed the gravesite with Holy Water.

Sometimes the question comes up, "What about people who die by suicide, who take their own life? Can they be buried in Catholic cemeteries?" In the past, it was not allowed. However, with advances in psychology, and a deeper understanding of what drives a person to suicide, the Church says yes, you can be buried in a Catholic cemetery, even if you've committed suicide. This is because we never knew the state of the person's heart or soul at the moment of the suicide. Yes, objectively, it is a mortal sin to kill somebody, to kill one's self, is a mortal sin. But, we never know about the subjective element. We never know about maybe, the mental illness, maybe the severe depression, the chemical imbalance. All those things could have been mitigating factors, and maybe the person wasn't held fully culpable or responsible. Maybe God had mercy upon their soul, and maybe they were saved. So, the Church does allow those who took their own life to have a Catholic Mass and a Catholic burial. We do pray for the repose of their soul. It's still, obviously, a mortal sin to kill anyone, including yourself; we'll talk about that more in a couple of weeks, during the Fourth and Fifth Commandments. The Fifth Commandment says, "Thou shall not kill."

Just as a little side note, because of the Church's greater understanding of psychology, it doesn't say that everybody who committed suicide is going to Hell. We hope and pray that some of them would have been saved, and could be saved, through God's mercy and God's forgiveness, maybe touched their heart at the last moment. St. John Vianney was comforting a woman whose husband had jumped off a bridge to commit suicide. St. John Vianney was a very holy priest. As he was talking to her, God gave him an insight (and actually, a vision) of what happened. God revealed to St. John Vianney that the man before, between the time he jumped, and the time he was killed, had made an Act of Contrition, and was sorry for what he had done, and he was saved. Again, that just shows that it's possible for somebody to have been saved, even if they took their own life. Even though it is a mortal sin objectively, subjectively, we just don't know what was going on in their mind and their heart. Perhaps, they could have been saved. So, they are allowed to be buried with a Catholic Mass in a Catholic cemetery.

If somebody passes away, we should have Masses said for them, because they might need it. We'll talk next week about Heaven, Hell, Death, and Purgatory, so we'll spend more time on that topic next week. If the person is in need of prayers, it's important to pray for the person, and to maybe have some Masses said for them. We call this the *Communion of Saints*, that our prayers can still help people that have gone before us. You can still pray for your parents, your grandparents, and if they're in Heaven or Purgatory, they can pray for you as well.

(A question). Catholic cemeteries are usually on Church property. There's one at Sacred Heart in Hoadly. At that parish, they have their own cemetery. Sacred Heart in Winchester has one; St. Mary's in Old Town, Alexandria; St. Mary's, Fairfax Station, on Sideburn Road, in the old historic Church there – they have a Catholic cemetery. What it means is it's really on Catholic property, Catholic grounds, and the whole cemetery has been consecrated and dedicated. Usually, the Bishop has blessed the whole piece of property. Whereas, in other places, just like Fairfax Memorial, when you go there, they have a Catholic section. When you see that, you'll see there are a lot more statues of the Blessed Mother, and Crucifixes, Angels, and everything.

We'll finish up tonight with talking about a very interesting, and difficult subject. The topic is on the "Mystery of Suffering." I hope all of you got the articles. This one is called "Suffering: How to Make the Greatest Evil in our Lives our Greatest Happiness." This one is called "The Art of Suffering." This handout is called "Life's Answers." I hope you got all three of these.

It's hard to say where we should talk about suffering, in the course of the year. We could talk about it, oh maybe, at the beginning of the year, but we tend to put it here, under this topic on the Anointing of the Sick, because suffering is something that everybody will experience at one point in their life, different kinds of suffering.

The definition of *suffering* is, "The disagreeable experience of soul that comes with the presence of evil, or the privation of some good." Suffering is a little bit different than pain. Suffering is called "the awareness of pain," or "the consciousness of pain." We can suffer physically, emotionally, or spiritually. See, animals do feel pain, but humans suffer a lot more, because we have an understanding of pain, and experience of pain. A dog might be going through pain, but when a human being experiences pain, we also think about how many days we've been in pain in the past, and how many more days we could be in pain in the future. Our suffering is, of course, much greater, because we have a consciousness of pain; we can reflect upon it.

One of the interesting things, when we first look at physical pain, is that physical pain actually is a blessing. There was an article that came out a couple of years ago, from a newspaper in England, about two children that were born into the

same family that had a rare disease, where they could not experience physical pain. Have any of you heard about children born with that? It's a terrible thing. On the surface, it would seem tremendous. You could be born and not feel any pain. You could stab yourself with a knife and not feel pain. You would think, "Oh, that'd be great."

When you think about it, it's really a nightmare, because the children would put their hand in the fireplace, burning their hand, and just giggling and laughing while their whole hand is being burned off. Or, one will take a knife and stab the other child, and the other child will be starting to bleed terribly. Or, they would just go outside in the cold, and not feel the cold, and they wouldn't put a jacket on – they would catch pneumonia. All these things were happening, so it was a nightmare for the parents. They had to constantly watch their children, because their kids couldn't feel pain.

What normally happens to a person is that they don't live very long, because they never feel the pain of hunger, so they don't want to eat. They burn themselves. In a sense, this is what leprosy does as well. Leprosy deadens the nerves. What happens, people might be working on something, like carpentry, and they'll cut their hand, or cut their finger off, and it doesn't cause any pain. Pretty soon, the people who have leprosy, because they can't feel pain, lose their fingers, and their hands, and they just have little nubs at their elbow. Have you ever seen a leper colony? Now, of course, it's called Hanson's Disease. They have some of these treatments for Hanson's Disease nowadays. One of the things they try to do is to put sensors on the body, so when the body is experiencing pain, it gives them a very sharp sound in their ear, to tell them to stop. That's just a little bit of a side note, that physical pain really is a suffering, because if we didn't feel that, we would all kill ourselves off very quickly. Suffering is sort of a blessing in that way.

What about other kinds of sufferings, suffering that has come into this world? Suffering is a result of sin having entered the world. It's really an effect of Original Sin. We know this from Scripture, that it was the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, that brought death, illness, and disease into this world. The effects of Original Sin, committed by Adam, are we have:

- A darkened intellect
- A weakened will
- An inclination toward sin

God created everything good, but He gave our first parents free will. This free will gave them the ability to choose: to love and serve God, or to choose themselves over God. We had the inheriting the effects of Original Sin. Some people say, "Why did God create disease? Why did God create illness? Why did God create death?" The answer is: God did not create these things. God created our first parents without these things. Our first parents would not have died; they would not have experienced illness, if they had not sinned. Unfortunately, they did

choose to sin, and because of that, illness, death, and disease entered into the world. So, all of these things are the result of the Original Sin by Adam, the head of the human race. Remember, when the head of the human race chooses something, the entire race experiences it as well.

For example, if the president of a country goes to war, then the whole nation, obviously, is at war. If the father of a family robs a bank and goes to jail, or loses his inheritance, then the children lose the inheritance as well. Let's say if a father was a multimillionaire, and he lost all his money gambling, then unfortunately, the kids would lose their inheritance. They didn't do anything wrong to lose the inheritance, but the head of the family lost it, and unfortunately, the children don't receive the inheritance. This is what happened as well with Original Sin. Free will was given by God to our first parents.

The effects of Original Sin have affected nature as well, and perhaps the Fall of the Angels has affected nature too. Floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, all these things are occurring in our world as a result of a lack of harmony in the universe, which could have been caused by the Fall of the Angels, or the effects of our first parents committing that sin against God, which brought about a disharmony in nature as well. In the Book of Genesis it talks about how the animals all got along together, how the lions would not attack the lambs. There was harmony in the Garden of Eden, but after Adam sinned, that affected the created world as well. So, natural disasters, animals fighting and eating each other, and all these things we could say, in a sense, are somehow related to the Original Sin of the Angels and of our parents, Adam and Eve. Things like illnesses and disease entered the world due to sin. Children that are born physically handicapped, with Down's Syndrome, or retarded in some way, these are just the effects of the Original Sin of our first parents.

Whose fault is it, that these things occur? Again, some people blame God, saying, "Why did God allow these things to happen?" What we'll learn in a few moments is that God allows these things to happen to bring about a greater good. So, even these things that have happened, God can still bring good out of every difficulty, out of every tragedy in life.

Other kinds of suffering that we endure, usually it's through our own fault - for example, wars, poverty, and killing. Sometimes people blame God. They say, "Why does God allow these things to happen?" Like in Rwanda, the one million people being killed, for example, or the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews. Why does God do these things? Again, God doesn't do these things; He gives us free will, and it's human beings that do these things to each other - things like poverty, war, famine, and killing. Often times, these things are human's fault, human's doing. We can't blame God for the way we treat one another.

Realize that God can, and wants to, bring good out of everything. Even in some of the natural disasters, God can bring good out of that. How terrible tragedies

they are, and yet, look at some of the good that can sometimes come out of this: people being generous, people taking up collections, sending food and clothing; material relief to those that are needy. So, it brings out goodness in other people, that we can show our generosity to the poor, to the needy. It brings people together. Think of the many professions that are built upon trying to alleviate human suffering. For example, think of all the good the doctors do, that the nurses do, that hospitals do, in taking care of the sick. God can bring other people closer to God in taking care of the sick and suffering.

When a child is born into this world, let's say with Down's Syndrome, or some other illness, that child really is a saint. That child can never sin. That child will obviously go to Heaven, and never offend God, and probably never commit a serious sin in their whole life. They will enter into Heaven with their baptismal innocence. Even with something like that, God can bring good out of a difficult situation.

Realize that we all have free will, and free choice. We can become a Mother Teresa, or a Hitler; it depends on the choices that we make in life. God gives everybody free will. We can do great things for God, or we can turn against Him and do evil. We even have situations where, let's say, a child runs away from the family, and leaves the Church, and goes and does all sorts of terrible things. That's not something God wants. God gave the person free will. They can choose to do those things. What happens is that even God can bring good out of that, because maybe the parents will pray more for their child. Maybe that child will come back to the family and back to the Faith.

There are all sorts of good that God can bring about, even out of difficult situations. You have Mothers Against Drunk Drivers - terrible things of their teenagers being killed by drunk drivers. And yet, these mothers have joined together to try to do good, based upon that. I think the one fellow's name is John Walsh, didn't he do something with the "America's Most Wanted?" I met him once. He gave a talk at the MCI Centre a couple of years ago. He's a tremendous man. He was born and raised Catholic. I think it was his son, I believe, that was kidnapped and killed. He turned his anger towards trying to track down killers on "America's Most Wanted," and they have actually been very successful in helping to capture 40 criminals, or maybe way more than that. See how even with difficulties or tragedies in life, God can bring good out even the worst tragedy?

The perfect example is the Crucifixion. There's nothing worse than the fact that we killed the Son of God. Our sins killed the Son of God, in the Crimen Deicide. Was there any good brought out of the Crucifixion? Yes – our salvation! So, the worst thing you could imagine, the Crucifixion of the Son of God, has brought about our redemption. If you ever have a doubt that God can bring good out of evil, look at the Crucifixion.

Why does God allow suffering in our life? Realize, first of all, God wants our eternal salvation. He wants us to get to Heaven, and to save our souls. What God sees from above, we see from down below. A good analogy: see this rug there, like a tapestry? When we look at it from above, we see the design. If you lifted it up from the underside of it, it would be very difficult to make out the pattern, and you wouldn't see the beauty of it. That's where we are right now in this life. We don't see all the ramifications, the pattern, but we trust in God that He's in control, and that He sees it from above. When we get to Heaven, we'll see the beautiful pattern of the tapestry of our life.

Sometimes God allows suffering in our life, to bring about a greater spiritual benefit, to help save our soul. A good example in the Bible is the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal Son squandered his inheritance. He told his father, "I want my inheritance now. I don't want to wait until you're dead to give me the inheritance in your will. I want it right now." He went off, and he spent all his money on wine, women, and song. Then, he hit rock-bottom. Once he hit rock-bottom, he was so hungry; he wanted to eat the food that the pigs were eating. It was only when he suffered, and he had depravation, and he hit rock-bottom, that he turned his life around. That's the case. Many times, people go to prison. That's when they turn their life around. When people experience suffering, often times that's a time when their conversion takes place.

There's an interesting story with Kimberly Hahn. Some of you know or have heard of her husband, Scott Hahn, who is coming to speak this coming Saturday, out in Purcellville, St. Francis Parish. He's given a series of talks. He's a famous convert to the Catholic Faith. He was an anti-Catholic Presbyterian minister who converted to the Catholic Faith. He's brilliant. He's written about ten books, and made over 500 audio tapes. I would recommend, if you could go out, to see him this Saturday. His wife tells a story of once, their four-year old daughter had a very high fever, something like a 104 degree fever. She called the doctor and said, "What do I do?" He said, "Throw her in the bathtub and throw ice in the tub."

(At this point, the first side of the tape ended. It resumes below).

When she looked up, and her little daughter was crying, saying, "Mommy, why are you hurting me?" She was doing this; she had to inflict this kind of suffering in order to break the fever, to save her life. Sometimes God allows us to experience suffering, in order to save our immortal soul.

There are some other cases, in the lives of the saints, where people had great conversions as well. St. Francis of Assisi was a soldier. He wasn't very close to God. He was kidnapped, and he spent some time in the dungeon. He began to reflect on his life. He realized that he needed to get close to God. He then went back home, gave up everything, and became the founder of this great order called the Franciscans. He never maybe would have had that life change, had he

not been kidnapped as a soldier, and been deprived of freedom, and experienced that difficulty.

Another saint was St. Ignatius of Loyola. He also was a soldier. He was struck in the leg by a cannonball. During his recovery in this castle, he wanted to read romance novels, but they didn't have any. All they had was the Bible, and a book of the saints. He read that, and it changed his whole life. He became the founder of the Jesuits.

The Bible says that, "As gold is tested in the fires, so are we, in the fire of God's love." Sometimes we need some suffering, for God to give us a wakeup call, to get our attention. Many people turn their life over to God if they have a near-death experience, or a near-fatal car accident.

Sometimes, we bring suffering upon ourselves, by our own choices. Sometimes, we blame God, and yet, if we look at it, it might have been our own choices that have brought suffering upon ourselves. For example, somebody who is a heavy smoker, a couple of packs a day, winds up getting lung cancer, and blames God for it. Is it really God's fault, or is it the person's fault? Let's say people who overeat, and have all sorts of health problems because of the amount that they eat. If they contract some sort of diabetes, or whatever, maybe it was because of their own eating habits; they brought that suffering upon themselves. Or, a heavy drinker might have liver damage, or something, because of the amount that the person drank. Or, somebody who had an immoral lifestyle, or a homosexual lifestyle, might contract AIDS; and sometimes people blame God for these things, and yet often times, it's their own choices that bring the suffering upon themselves.

The harder ways to understand suffering is when you look at the innocent. What about the babies that have cancer? What about an innocent baby whose mother was on crack when she was pregnant? What about those? What about an innocent child who gets a blood transfusion and gets AIDS? These questions are much more difficult to shed light on. Often times, we do suffer because of the choices of others. We see examples of this all the time, where often times, the innocent can suffer at the hands of cruel people. For example, a drunk driver hits a minivan, full of a family - a wife, husband, and kids. Some of the kids are killed. The kids were innocent - why did they have to die? We live in the world. The way God set it up is that our will can affect other people, for good or for bad. Look how much good Mother Teresa did, during her life of generosity to the poor. Look how much evil Hitler did, or Stalin, or Mussolini. We live in a world where our lives affect one another, for good or for bad.

There are examples of innocent people suffering in the Bible, like Job. Job was obviously one of the wealthiest men in history. He had a wife, a number of sons and daughters, and the whole works. God took away his health, his children, and all his wealth. He lost everything, except for Mrs. Job, and that was probably

more of a cross, to keep Mrs. Job. God eventually restored everything to Job. Job was an innocent man, and he suffered. God did take care of him.

We know that suffering is not necessarily linked to sin. For example, Jesus never sinned, and yet, He suffered a great deal, as He took upon Himself the sins of the world. The Blessed Mother never sinned, and yet, did Mary suffer? She sure did, at the foot of the Cross. So, we know that innocent people can suffer. People who are not guilty can suffer at the hands of others. The good news is that, when the innocent suffer in this world, they will be rewarded in the next life.

We come to the answer to the question of suffering. What is the answer to the question? The answer is Christ, that He is really the only answer to the mystery of suffering. Peter Kreeft says, "Jesus doesn't give us the answer, He is the answer." In the Incarnation, God became man, so that He could show us how to suffer well. God could not suffer up in Heaven. See, God is God. God cannot experience suffering. When God became a baby in Christ, when God as Christ, was crowned with thorns, was spat upon, carried the Cross, was crucified - does God know what it's like to suffer? The answer is yes. Do we suffer in life? Yes. Is God distant, and doesn't know anything about suffering? No. God became part of this world when He became Incarnate as Christ. We could have complained, had not God become man. We could have complained all the time, saying, "God, why do You allow all this suffering in the world?" If God remained up in Heaven, on His royal throne, and never did anything about it, we would have a right to complain. But, God knows what it's like to suffer. In fact, He suffered more than any of us ever will.

For example, does God know what it's like to suffer? Did God ever have a headache? We have headaches, migraine headaches. I guess we could say yes, Jesus knows what it's like to have a headache, because His head was crowned with thorns.

Does Jesus know what it's like to be hungry? He went without food for forty days. What about thirsty? Does God know what it's like to be thirsty? Yes, on the Cross Jesus said, "I thirst." His thirst was terrible, because He had lost so much blood, and He suffered so much.

Has God ever been rejected by His friends, or betrayed by His friends? He sure did, in the Agony in the Garden. Look at what Judas did. Judas betrayed Him. Peter denied Him three times. All of Jesus' friends ran away. The only one that was left was John, who wound up at the foot of the Cross.

Does Jesus know what it's like to be slandered or abandoned? Yes. On the Cross, He said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Jesus willingly allowed Himself to experience this kind of desolation.

Does God know what it's like to be a refugee, to have to flee His homeland, to live under an oppressive government? He sure did. They had to flee to Egypt to save Jesus' life. He lived under the Roman Empire, under an oppressive government.

Does God know what it's like to lose a loved one, to lose a spouse, to lose a child, or to lose a parent? He sure does. When the Lord was a teenager, He lost His foster father, St. Joseph. So, the Lord experienced the loss of a loved one.

Does God know what it's like to mourn or to weep? Yes, Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

Does God know what it's like to be in a car accident, to hurt your hands, or your feet, or to be burned, or to have your flesh torn, or your heart broken? Yes. Look at what Jesus went through in the Agony in the Garden, carrying the Cross, being mocked, being spat upon, having nails driven through His hands and feet, being scourged terribly. The Lord suffered more than any of us could ever imagine. Christ took our place on the Cross. It's an amazing thing to think about how much Jesus suffered for us.

Also, it's important to remember that the way Christ suffered is that He took all of our sins upon Himself. The Crowning of Thorns redeemed our pride. The Scourging at the Pillar redeemed the sins of the flesh, the sins of lust. The pierced hands and feet make up for our sins of greed and avarice. The Lord going through the dark night of the soul, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" made up for the sins of atheism. If an innocent person like Christ suffered, we shouldn't complain when we experience suffering as well, because we have Original Sin as well as our own personal sins. So, Christianity does not take away our suffering, but it does give meaning, and a reason, for our suffering. If we have a meaning of suffering, a reason, it can make the suffering bearable. When a woman goes through labor pains to give birth, yes, there's pain there, but she goes through it to bring about the birth of a child. There are reasons for her pain, to bring about new life into the world.

With us, there is value, and reasons, for our suffering as well. We can unite it to Christ. We can offer it up to the Lord, and it can help to shape us and mold us more and more into His image and likeness. Even Christ predicted, "As they treated Me, so they will treat my followers."

Realize that there is a Heaven, and there is a Hell. Everything always gets worked out in the end. You might say, "Why do all those evil people never get pulled over by the cop when they drive through a red light? Why is that? Why do I, as an innocent person, always get busted?" In the next world, everything gets sorted out. Everybody gets rewarded or punished in the next world. If there were no afterlife, life would be very unfair. If there was no Heaven or Hell, life would be

unfair. Fortunately, everybody will get what they deserve, for good or for bad, in the next world.

How do you deal with suffering? Have the mind of Christ. When you go through suffering, pray the prayer that Jesus gave in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Lord, let this cup of suffering pass me by. But, not my will, but Thine be done." It's okay to pray to get rid of the suffering. Say, "Lord, please take this suffering away from me. But, not my will, but Thine be done."

I remember somebody once called into Mother Angelica on the live show on TV and said, "When I have a headache, should I take some aspirin?" Mother Angelica said, "Yes. Take the aspirin, but, if you still have the headache afterward, then God wanted you to have a headache. It's still okay to take the aspirin. If the aspirin doesn't get rid of it, then just offer it up." Don't waste your suffering – it's very valuable. *Offer up your suffering like a prayer.* If you're suffering, offer up an hour of your suffering for a specific intention: for your husband, for your wife, for your kids. Offer up your sufferings, because that becomes like a prayer.

You can *offer up your suffering in reparation for your past sins*. You can actually do your Purgatory on Earth, so that when you die, you go straight to Heaven. If you offered up all your trials, tribulations, and sufferings in this world, that would be like a form of purification. You can *offer up your sufferings in reparation for the sins of others, for the sins of the world*. Unite your sufferings to Christ on the Cross. St. Paul says in 1 Colossians, Chapter 1, Verse 24, "I fill up in my own flesh what is lacking in the suffering of Christ, for the sake of His Body, the Church." How can that be? Christ is the Head; we are the members. The head suffered, and when we go through our suffering, we can offer that up as well, with Christ for the sake of His Body, the Church.

Some of the things that will help are:

- Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. When you pray the Rosary, that can help you, because you meditate upon the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Crucifixion, etc.
- Make the Stations of the Cross. We do this during Lent. There are 14 Stations of the Cross. When we walk the Way of the Cross, it can give us comfort when we go through suffering.
- Get a crucifix. Everybody should have a crucifix in their home. St. Thomas Aquinas said he learned more by looking at a crucifix about God's love than reading any book. When you look at a crucifix, you see how much Jesus suffered for each one of us.
- Realize that suffering can make us bitter or better. Remember that suffering, in and of itself, is something that everybody will experience, because it's the awareness of pain. It's morally neutral. It can lead a person towards God or away from God. It can make them bitter or better. I think the difference is if we focus too much on the "I" (ourselves), too

much of ourselves, perhaps too much self-pity, too much self-centeredness; it can make us bitter. If we can empty ourselves, I think the “E” should stand for being Empty, to empty ourselves of self, then suffering can make us a better people.

- Sufferings will be your stumbling block. Most people, if you ever meet an atheist, usually the reason is because they don't understand suffering in the world. They say, “How could a good God allow bad things to happen? How could a good God allow a tsunami to happen? How could a good God allow wars to happen?” Suffering is the number one reason why people reject God. It's also the number one reason why people become closer to God. Suffering will be your stumbling block, or your stepping stone.

When Christ was crucified, there were two thieves on either side. One rejected God, and one accepted Him. One said, “Jesus, remember me when You come into your Kingdom.” The other said, “You fool! Come down from that Cross, and we'll believe You.” Keep that in mind, that one cursed Jesus; the other one blessed Him. But they both suffered, right? They both suffered equally. Suffering, in and of itself, will divide a person, will bring them closer to God, or, take them away from God.

There is an example of a priest that I know who is in St. Louis. He got a call to go to a home, because their 18-year old son had been killed in a car accident. When the priest got there, the police officers were there at the same time to explain it to the parents. As soon as the father heard the story, he went crazy. He started throwing a vase into the wall; he started breaking things. He said, “If there is a God, I curse Him, and I hate Him.” Whereas the mother took out her Rosary beads and began praying the Rosary, began weeping. Eventually, what happened was that the father wound up in a mental institution, and the mother became very active in the Church, and was one of the leaders in the Pro-Life Movement. They both lost the same son; they both suffered, but one became bitter and one became better. One used the grief to serve God, and the other one turned away from God. It's something to keep in mind.

Another question, as we end tonight, ask yourself, “Will rejecting God make things better? Will rejecting God bring the child back? Will rejecting God make the cancer go away?” No. It doesn't do any good to reject God in times of suffering. What happens is, if you reject God, it's like you're getting rid of your source of strength. So, don't reject God in times of suffering. Lean upon God, and don't reject Him, because jettisoning God, getting rid of God, is not going to make anything better. It'll just make things worse, because then you have nobody to rely on, nobody to draw strength from.

Realize that after every Good Friday, there's an Easter Sunday. On every calendar, Sunday always comes after Friday. Realize they're God's ways, and not our ways. God is God. He knows what He's doing. The short answer to “Why

does God allow suffering?" is "to bring about a greater good." That's the only reason why God allows suffering. He allows suffering, so greater good can come out of it, whatever that good might be.

If you're interested in reading about this topic, I'd recommend a book called The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis. Another book is called Making Sense Out of Suffering by Peter Kreeft. Mother Angelica has a great book called Answers, Not Promises. Bishop Sheen has some very good tapes, one about the meaning of suffering, and another one called "The Continuing Passion of Christ." There are lots of great books. Just go to any Catholic bookstore, and they all have books about how to deal with suffering.

(A question). Our sufferings do prepare our souls for Heaven. Like the Bible says, "As gold that is purified in the fires, so we are purified." It's almost like a craftsman, when he's making a beautiful chalice. He uses gold, and he puts it into the fire to burn off the dross. Once he can see his image or reflection, then he knows it's ready. It's as if sometimes God puts us in the fire, until He sees His own reflection in us, and then He knows we're ready for Heaven. That's what Purgatory is. Sufferings can make our souls ready for Heaven. But what about others? The answer is yes, you can offer up your suffering, because we're part of the Body of Christ. When one member offers up their sufferings, it can help the whole Church.

For example, Pope John Paul II, as you know, is in the hospital right now with the flu, so pray for him. They said, "What good is he doing as Pope? He's 84 years old. What's he doing?" One answer is, "He's suffering for the Church." He's offering up his old age, his difficulties, and his Parkinson's. He can offer that for the good of the Church. He might be doing more good now than when he was a young, vibrant Pope with 58 years of age, skiing and swimming. Maybe he's doing more good for the Church through suffering.