

The Discipleship and Hardship

Hardship is not an easy subject matter that human beings would readily embrace, even for the disciples of Jesus, unless it is connected with a noble cause from which human courage and strength would naturally pour out to take hardships in stride.

Hardship sometimes could serve to bring out the best human spirit. In life we see our parents work extra hours or take a second job to put us in good schools. We see in the battlefield soldiers laid down their lives to protect their country. We see in the tragedy of Colorado theatre shooting four brave young men died using their bodies as the shield to protect their loved ones. We see in 9/11 terrorist attack our Pastor Fr. Ray ran to the crumbled Twin Towers to serve the people. These people embraced hardship for a noble cause.

On the other side, hardship could be feared and shunned altogether without positive values when the recognition of its inherent purpose is not formed. In fact before the Resurrection the disciples didn't understand the hardship Jesus had to take in his Passion. They were just genuinely excited and inspired by the greatness of the Messiah (Mt 1:16), the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 61:1; Lk 3:4) who came "to bring glad tidings to the poor", "to proclaim liberty to captives", "to recover the sight to the blind" and "to let the oppressed go free." (Lk 4:18)

However when Jesus first predicated that "the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days" Peter was unprepared and rebuked. When Jesus proclaimed, "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:5-56), many of his disciples left. When the human mind failed to recognize the Messiah in the form of the suffering Servant, hardship became no more than frustration to avoid.

The Messiah's violent death shattered the disciples, who were good and earthy fishermen not unfamiliar with hardships but couldn't bring themselves to be with Jesus in suffering. It is not only because the physical torment was harsh, but the recognition of the connection between their lives and Christ's Paschal Mystery had not yet formed.

Resurrection confirmed all Christ's works and teachings, and most of all, his divinity. The disciples witnessed the phenomenon of the empty tomb and the burial cloths lying aside, realizing that by God's power Christ broke the bonds of death and corruption; by his death he conquered death. The disciples also encountered the Risen Lord who breathed the Holy Spirit on them. In this special moment the mission of Christ is connected with the mission of the Church: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (Jn 20:21-22) The disciples were also encouraged by the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost as the fulfillment of Jesus' divine promise to them.

From here on the disciples rooted their faith in this suffering Servant of God and embraced the cross. Hardship and suffering start taking on a positive meaning: they are the signs of God's ultimate sacrifice and love for humanity who is now offered a share in the divine life through Christ. The disciples connected their lives with Jesus in these dimensions:

- In following Christ the example: "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example so that we should follow in his steps." (1Pet 2:21)
- In baptism: "We were indeed buried with him thorough baptism into death, so that, just as Christ as raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might live in newness of life." (Rom 6:4)
- In redemption: God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2Cor 5:21)
- In resurrection: "As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom 6:4)
- In brotherhood: As Jesus himself called his disciples after his Resurrection: "Go and tell my brethren." (Mt 28:10; Jn 20:17) we are brothers of Christ through our faith by grace.
- In God's love: "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. We were reconciled to God thorough the death of his son. Through whom we received reconciliation." (Rom 5:8)

- On the purpose of life: the disciples' lives are connected to the divine life through Jesus, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (2Cor 5:15; cf. Col 3:1-3) (CCC 655)

Connected with Jesus' Paschal Mystery, now hardship is viewed necessary and destined: Paul and Barnabas strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere the faith: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. " (Acts 14: 22) In the mission of spreading the Gospel, "no one be disturbed in these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this." (2 Thess 3:3)

Once the experience of hardship is connected to that of Jesus, it is no longer a burden but a joy or badge of honor of suffering with Christ. The disciples later became great evangelists. St. Paul and St. Peter became martyrs. With great love for Jesus and men, hardship could be a sacrifice to God and a sharing in His divine life, with Holy Mother being the role model. She humbled herself and listens to God. She meditated God's words in her heart and let God realize his plan of salvation through her. She remained at the foot of the Cross with her son Jesus as an active participant of the divine salvation.



The Christopher Columbus we know

On October 12, 1492, Christopher Columbus set foot on a small island in the Bahamas. Since then he has been hailed as a great explorer, navigator and colonist by the popular media, however few of us today know that in the first place Columbus is a devout Catholic Christian, a man set by a heavenly fire to evangelize. He had the mission to preach the Gospel to the end of the world. In this sense he inaugurated America with a Christian faith. Here I'd like to share with you the famous writer Washington Irving's words of him:

He was deeply devout: religion is deep in his thoughts, actions and his most private writings. Whenever he made any great discovery, he celebrated it by a solemn mass to thank God. The voice of prayer and praise rose from his ships when they reached the New World. His first action on landing was to prostrate himself upon the earth and return thanksgivings to God. Every evening the vesper hymns were chanted by his crew, and masses were performed in the beautiful harbor of the land. All his great enterprises were undertaken in the name of the Holy Trinity, and he took the communion before sailing. He was a firm believer in the efficacy of vows and penances and pilgrimages, and resorted to them in times of difficulty and danger. The religion deeply seated in his soul brought forth a sober dignity and kind composure over his whole personality. His language was pure and guarded, and free from all irreverent expressions.

I hope you would share with your friends and especially children the true person of Christopher Columbus and be inspired by him!



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門徒與面對苦難

人類大都不願接受苦難，基督門徒也不例外，除非它有著高尚的成因，而人類能從中發揮勇氣和力量去跨越苦難。

苦難有些時候能帶出人性光輝的一面。在日常生活中，我們可以看到父母為著他們的子女能入讀好的學校而辛勞地加班和做兼職。我們會在戰場上找到為保衛國家而捐軀的士兵。我們可以在科羅拉多州戲院槍擊案中找到用他們身軀去保護至愛的年青人。我們可以看到我們的司鐸盧神父在 911 恐怖襲擊當日趕往災區去服務有需要的死傷者。以上各人都懷著高尚的完因去迎接苦難。

另一方面，苦難是可怕的當我們找不到它背後正面的價值。就像在耶穌復活之前的門徒不明白耶穌為什麼要受難一樣。他們非常興奮和熱情地迎接他們的默西亞（瑪 1:16），盼望祂對舊約的滿全（路 3:4）；祂到來為貧窮人傳報喜訊，向俘虜宣告釋放，向盲者宣告復明，使受壓迫者獲得自由。（路 4:18）

但當耶穌預告：「人子將會受苦，並受到長老、司祭長和經師們的拒絕，還要殺害祂；但第三天祂要復活。」時，伯多祿還沒有準備好和懷疑祂。當耶穌宣告：「我的肉，是真實的食品；我的血，是真實的飲料。誰吃我的肉，並喝我的血，便住在我內，我也住在他內。」（若 6:5-56）時，很多門徒都相繼離開。當人類意識不到所期待的默西亞會以一個受苦的僕人身份出現時，苦難變成了要逃避的挫折。

默西亞的死亡粉碎了門徒的希望，他們都是良善和世俗的漁民，並不熟識和了解苦難和耶穌受難對他們之間的關係。這不單是身體的受苦使人不快，而且門徒亦意識不到基督逾越的奧秘和他們生命的關係。

復活確定了基督的所有的作為和教訓，還有祂的天主性。門徒親眼目睹空的墓園和放在一旁的殮布，意識到天主給基督能力去打破死亡的束縛，透過祂的聖死去戰勝死亡。門徒更接觸到復活的基督，並領受了聖神。就在這特別的時刻，基督把祂的使命委派給教會：「就如父派遣了我，我也同樣派遣你們。」（若 20:21-22）基督也實現了祂的承諾，讓門徒在五旬節領受聖神，使他們得到鼓勵。

從此門徒把信德植根於這個為主受苦的僕人身上，並迎接他們的十字架。苦難和受苦開始有了正面的意義：它是天主為人類犧牲和愛的標記，而人類現正透過基督分享這聖化的生命。門徒的生活與耶穌在以下幾方面聯繫起來：

- 在以基督作我們的榜樣時：「基督也為你們受了苦，給你們留下了榜樣，叫你們追隨他的足跡。」（伯前 2:21）
- 在領洗時：「我們藉著洗禮已歸於死亡與祂同葬了，為的是基督怎樣藉著父的光榮，從死者中復活了，我們也怎樣在新生活中度生。」（羅 6:4）
- 在為我們贖罪時，天主「曾使那不認識罪的，替我們成了罪，好叫我們在祂內成為天主的正義。」（格後 5:21）
- 在復活時：「為的是基督怎樣藉著父的光榮，從死者中復活了，我們也怎樣在新生活中度生。」（羅 6:4）



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- 在兄弟關係中：耶穌在復活後稱呼門徒為兄弟：「妳們去，報告我的兄弟。」（瑪 28:10，若 20:17）我們藉著信德和天主的恩典成為耶穌基督的兄弟。
- 在天主的愛中：「基督在我們還是罪人的時候，就為我們死了，這證明了天主怎樣愛我們。」（羅 5:8）
- 在我們的生命中，藉著基督門徒的生命得已聖化，因此他們「不再為自己生活，而是為替他們死而復活了的那位生活。」（格後 5:15;格前 3:1-3）

藉著基督踰越的奧秘，苦難變成有必要和預定的：巴爾納伯和保祿宗徒堅固門徒的心，鼓勵他們堅持信仰，說「我們必須經過許多困難，纔能進入天主的國。」（宗 14:22）在傳福音的使命時，「祂必堅固你們；保護你們免於凶惡。」（得後 3:3）

當為基督的原固已受苦時，苦難不再是重擔，而是喜悅和光榮。宗徒們後來成為偉大的傳道員，聖保祿和聖伯多祿成為殉道者。懷著愛主愛人的心，苦難成為對天主的奉獻和分享祂聖化生命的標記。聖母可以作為我們的榜樣，祂謙卑聽命，對天主計劃不明白的地方都默存在心，反覆思量，配合天主救贖的計劃。祂在十字架下陪伴祂的兒子耶穌，成為耶穌基督救贖工程的積極參與者。

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王秀容

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人是天主所愛的對象，因此誰人相信耶穌接受了天國的喜訊，愛天主；怎可以拒絕愛天主所愛的人呢？所以耶穌把愛天主在萬有之上和愛人如己的誠命連結起來，從此誰也不能說，他愛天主但無法愛人。

但誰是近人呢？凡是需要我們幫助的人，都是我們的近人。不分國家，不論種族，都是我們愛的對象。尤其是當他們有急需時，我們更應把他們看作近人看待。這也是耶穌在福音所說的。

我們承認這並是一條容易遵守的誠命，不過我們愛天主的熱情會使我們跨越種種的困難，去遵守這條神聖的誠命。天主是會以祂的慈愛、寬宥來照顧我們。

天父的恩典也是賜給每一個人的，祂使太陽上升，光照善人，也同時光照惡人；祂降雨給義人，同時也給不義的人。因此我們應祈求天主的協助，讓我們愛人如同祂愛我們一樣，給我們生命多一點純真、寬容、信心、愛惜、樂觀和勇氣。

美的人生是一份關愛，反思相依而忠貞的生活是一種付出並接納無私之愛的生活。新約的總綱是愛人如己，即彼此相親相愛！



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