

Love is not incompatible with suffering. Because God loves us, he will not rest until he sees us wholly lovable. From that perspective, the suffering of human beings who are in need of alteration, freedom from sin and redemption is in fact a corollary to God's goodness.

How does this assist in understanding pain that happens without any apparent human intervention or cause? Lewis suggests that a key element is that pain shatters the illusion of our self-sufficiency. People have a tendency to forget God when things are going well. They turn to Him more when in distress. Further, God's requirement of the surrender of our human will to His is contrary to our nature. As Jesus says, *"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction"*. However unpalatable we find the experience of suffering, and however much we may properly try to reduce suffering in others and in ourselves, suffering can help us understand our weaknesses and imperfections, to bring us closer to God and surrender to His will, not ours. While directing us to a better understanding of suffering, Lewis did humbly admit: *"You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it. You need not guess for I will tell you; I am a great coward."* - **Stephen S.**

**Entrance Antiphon: Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.**

**First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23**

**Responsorial Psalm: 136 Response: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!**

**Second Reading: Ephesians 2: 4-10**

**Gospel Acclamation: Glory and praise to you, O Christ! God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son; everyone who believes in him has eternal life. Glory and praise to you, O Christ!**

**Gospel: John 3: 14-21**

**Memorial Acclamation: We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.**

**Communion Antiphon: Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one together. It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord.**



## **Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle B, 2024 Weekly Reflection): From Suffering to Redemption: (1) Suffering:**

A central theme of Lent is that through Christ's Passion and Cross we are redeemed and offered salvation. This short series begins today with a brief

consideration of the perennial difficulty of why human beings suffer. For my comments on this topic I have tried to synthesise some of the thoughts of C.S. Lewis in his book: "The Problem of Pain". These thoughts do, I believe, offer assistance in understanding the reason for suffering.

In his chapter on Divine Goodness Lewis explains that God, being infinitely wise, His judgment and understanding of goodness must differ from our limited understanding of it, even though our understanding grasps some of its essentials. Lewis illustrates the difficulty in this way: *"The Divine "goodness" differs from ours, but it is not sheerly different: it differs from ours not as white from black but as a perfect circle from a child's first attempt to draw a wheel. But when the child has learned to draw, it will know that the circle it then makes is what it was trying to make from the very beginning."* Similarly, God's love differs from our concept of love. Critically, God's love is not to be confused with 'kindness'. Kindness is the desire to see others happy. Kindness is generally a good thing, but it has its limitations. It may not care whether the other person does good or bad things, so long as they escape suffering. Misplaced kindness, as opposed to true love, may lead to sinfulness, for example in the guise of assisted suicide. Lewis therefore says that if God is Love, He is by definition something much more than mere kindness: *"When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that God loves man: not that He has some "disinterested".. concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one.....: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way..... but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds....."* This leads us to the realisation that, being aware of the distinction between love and kindness and trying to recognise what it means to be the object of God's love, makes it easier to understand why His