

Mary with those who suffer

God found favor with Mary and chose her above all women on earth to give birth to his only Son. She was blessed and she was to hold an honored position in salvation history from the moment of the Annunciation throughout the ages. Yet, despite all of this, Mary's faith journey was not an easy one right from the beginning. She was not spared challenges or suffering. In fact, she endured the most painful suffering a mother can endure: to see her precious, beloved, son cruelly tortured, mocked and crucified on a cross.

Consider the challenges facing this young, poor, inexperienced woman:

- She was faced with being pregnant and unmarried.
- Her fiancée wanted to dump her.
- She had to make a dangerous trip to pay the Roman tax in the last week of her pregnancy.
- When it came time to deliver the child, she was not surrounded by her mother and other friends and family in the comfort of her home.
- Her baby was born in a stable.
- She had to gather her newborn child and flee to Egypt, presumably on a donkey or by foot, a few days after childbirth to an unknown land to escape Herod.
- She lived with the constant knowledge that someone wanted her child dead or would want him dead.
- She watched as her son became a lightning rod for dissention
- She suffered through his cruel torture and death, and she was at the foot of the cross when he died.

Does this sound like the life of one who was favored or blessed? Remember, also, that God's own beloved son was not spared from suffering. Neither were the Apostles. Sometimes, when things look bleak, we feel equally "blessed"!!! During those times, we may be tempted to ask, "But how can God love me if he lets me suffer like this?" We may be tempted to turn away from God rather than toward Him. In this session, we examine four types of suffering and how recourse to our Mother might help us either prevent, relieve, understand or accept suffering. The four kinds of suffering we will examine are:

1. The suffering we bring on ourselves by our own sin- Self-inflicted suffering.
2. The suffering that comes about due to the natural deterioration of our physical bodies and due to natural forces.
3. The suffering caused by acts of others, random acts which appear to happen for no apparent reason or caused by forces beyond our control, and
4. The suffering we accept and embrace because it means that we are moving closer to God and His will.

The suffering we bring on ourselves by our own sin:

This segment will, necessarily, be a short discussion since, unlike many of the other women in the Bible who are brazen sinners, Mary was not. Eve, Lot's wife, Jezebel, and many more, all provide us with models of women who disregarded God's words and the suffered the results.

If anything, through Mary, we are shown that despite the fact that we may endure suffering on this earth, if we stay on the path to holiness and if we comply with God's will for us, we will share in eternal life with Him. If one is looking for an answer as to how to avoid this kind of suffering, however, we can turn to Mary.

We turn to Mary as an example of obedience to God's plan for us. In principle, it is very simple: if you want to avoid the consequences of sin, avoid the sin. Avoid adultery, coveting things you do not need, lies, slander, theft in its many forms and all of the other numerous vices: greed, lust, hatred, envy, etc. etc. Is it really that hard? Just say "NO" to sin and "YES" to God. How can looking to Mary and the way she lived help us do this?

Tip No. 1: Fill your life with virtuous past-times, like Mary did. Do God's work and you have less time to tend to the devil's business.

How do you do God's work?

What do you consider to be your greatest talent or asset? How can you use that talent or asset to do God's work?

What church ministries or organizations are you involved with and what do you like best about being a member of that group?

Tip No. 2: Associate with those who also make God a priority in their lives. If you spend your time with those who live in a manner inconsistent with the Bible, it is more likely that you will come to believe that such behavior is "normal" and "okay." It is not. Thus, we see the importance of the "community of faith." The strength of the community, believing and acting of one accord, gives strength to the individual to face his or her own individual challenges.

If you were the only one in the world who believed in Christ, how would you feel about that?

How do you feel when you know people you respect and believe to be intelligent believe in God?

How does it make you feel when you see them actually living their faith?

Do you have friends who are not good influences on you?

What keeps you from replacing them with friends who are more Christ-like?

Has there ever been a time when someone else's faith helped strengthen yours?

Tip No. 3: Turn to Mary in prayer for her guidance and help to intercede on your behalf with God for the strength to avoid temptation and sin. Time spent in reflection and prayer to Mary is time that your mind cannot be engaged in harmful and destructive thoughts. It is time during which one can gain the calm and resolve to continue the fight to stay on the path to holiness. It is time during which you can reflect on that which you know to be true: that today's wrongful wants and desires will necessarily be converted into regret, sorrow and suffering, if not in this life, in the next. When Mary was perplexed, she pondered things. She reflected carefully and prayed.

Satan would like nothing more than for you to rush headlong into sin. He does not want you to take time to reflect and pray. Ask Mary to help you today. Ask her for strength. Ask her to teach you obedience like she taught Jesus obedience when he was a child so that you, like Jesus, can avoid temptation when it assaults you. Following the

path of holiness leads you away from the path of self-inflicted suffering. It truly is that simple.

Have you ever done something you didn't quite think all the way through and later regretted it?

When faced with temptation of any kind, do you spend time in prayer before making decisions that could lead you away from God?

Have you ever asked Mary to help you? Do you feel that she responded? If so, how?

What kind of relationship do you have with Mary?

In the case of self-inflicted suffering due to our own sin, when we ask, "But how can God love me if he lets me suffer like this?" the proper response is: It was our own choice to suffer and God loves us enough to allow us to make that choice. You have the power to eliminate that kind of suffering from your life and help others do likewise.

The physical suffering that comes about due to the natural deterioration of our physical bodies and natural disasters.

Why do we have to get old? Why do we get cancer? Why do 300 die in an earthquake?

We have finite bodies and live in a finite world. Our bodies simply deteriorate. That's all there is to it. Many live as if they believe that their flesh and possessions will do them some good when they die. All a great looking body and lots of money can ever ensure is a good viewing in a lovely casket. They cannot ensure happiness in this life or the next. A beautiful spirit can do that for you.

There are natural forces that we cannot control. We know that earthquake faults and hurricane zones exist, yet we build houses in these areas. When the inevitable happens, we seem surprised. We refuse to understand and accept the finite nature of our world. We live our lives as if by ignoring certain facts, we can change them. We cannot.

If we accept that we are comprised of both flesh and spirit and we KNOW that eventually and inevitably the flesh will die, why ignore the health and well-being of the soul? The unreliable nature of our surroundings and the inherent weakness and fragility of our flesh should serve as a constant and welcome reminder that we need to work on fortifying the spirit—the ONLY part of us that has a chance for eternal life. If we were to acknowledge disease and natural disasters as such reminders and work to strengthen our spirit, we might gain a new understanding of life and death. Suffering caused by the natural deterioration of our bodies would be placed in a new perspective if we focus on God and how he helps us when we suffer.

Two stories illustrate this difference in perspective and the joy that difference can make in your life. Louise is a very sick elderly lady. She will tell you that her early life was terrible. She had an abusive step-father, and then rushed into a marriage with a man she knew she shouldn't have been with. He abused her too, but she says with a nod, "I knew better when I married him." She had four children before they divorced. They divorce at a time when divorce was

not fashionable. After that, she and the four children had to live with her mother. She had to work long, hard hours to support them all her life. She acknowledged that she got four good kids out of the deal. Even though she said she didn't mind having to work so hard all her life, she nevertheless categorized her whole life up to this point as "suffering." Now, she has cancer which has spread to her liver and she is in constant pain. She said that she could understand having to suffer some, but that she didn't understand why she had to suffer all her life. She is alone in her small apartment. She struggles with her pain and her fear. The only thing that relieves her suffering is the visit of her Eucharistic Minister who shares her faith with her and eases her fear. Being part of a community of faith is the only relief she has.

Eleanor is a 90 year old lady who always expresses how she doesn't understand why God has always been so good to her and her sister. She can't figure out why she is so blessed. She doesn't feel worthy to be blessed. She will tell you that they have always had it so good. Five minutes later, however, if you ask her about her childhood, as if she has totally forgotten the prior conversation, she will describe her childhood and you would be forced to label it as "horrible." They lived in a terrible neighborhood with no grass and no trees and only a few small poor houses. Her parents were not affectionate. When she was 12, her family lived in Florida for 6 months, but her parents decided to move back to Chicago a week before she would have graduated from 8th grade-- with no thought about what it would mean for Eleanor not to graduate. When they got back to Chicago, on her own, she found a school where she could finish up in the summer and get a certificate that would allow her to go on to high school. She was only 12. They moved 6 times that summer, and lived in dire conditions. Then her father had a stroke and lived for 5 and a half years paralyzed in their home. She remembers painfully, still, the day a young man she met at a dance drove her home and upon reaching her house, said, "You live here?" She never saw him again. The pain is still fresh, 70 years later.

Despite this, Eleanor will tell you that she has been blessed all her life. She remembers moments throughout her life that were magical, mystical and special—little moments such as riding down a street lined with palm trees with an exotic name (Tamiami Trail) in Florida 78 years ago. She remembers her first communion dress which made her feel like an angel. She remembers the little moments God lifted her out of her meager and dismal existence. She embraced those moments as a gift from God and her eyes still sparkle when she describes the events as if she were 12 again. She considered what to most of us would be a dismal childhood to be a blessed life.

Eleanor lives alone now. Her sister fell and broke her hip and is in a nursing home. Life has drastically changed for them both. They are separated for the first time in 86 years. Eleanor has always been fiercely independent and has always been the strong one, taking care of her little sister. During their ordeal, God sent many people to help them - virtual strangers, with no obligation to them. Eleanor knows that God sent them to her and she views each person sent her way as a gift from God. In the middle of all of the changes and the hardships they are undergoing, she cannot believe how much God must love her and her sister. Like Louise, and like Mary who after Jesus was crucified gathered with the apostles in the upper room in the community of faith, Eleanor understands how important the community of faith can be to those who are alone, isolated and suffering. If you find yourself in this situation, find the community of faith.

It is interesting to compare the difference in how the two view what appears to have been equally dismal childhoods. One thinks she suffered. One thinks she was blessed. One doesn't see where God was. One does. Focusing on God and the good in your life, leaves less time to focus on the suffering. It is equally interesting that being part of a community of faith gives both of them strength to face and handle their suffering.

Pastoral care ministers notice a difference in the people they see in nursing homes and in those who are near the end of their lives. There is a visible, palpable difference between those who have walked with God and are still walking with God and those who do not know their God. In the former, you see peace in their eyes and a joy despite the suffering. In the latter, you see fear. The former express gratitude for all God has done for them and still sing his praises. When you first begin this type of ministry and hear this, you think, "How can they be thankful that God allows them to lay in a bed for years, unable to barely move or swallow?" After a while, though, you realize that they are thankful that God is with them just as he was when their bodies were healthy and strong, comforting them and loving them. His presence soothes their suffering. His spirit within them remains strong despite their failing flesh.

Do you feel God's presence when you are suffering? Do you feel God's presence when you are not suffering? If there is a difference, why? Do you look for God harder when you are suffering or when you are doing just fine?

Strengthening our relationship with God helps remove the worst aspect of pain: the fear that accompanies it. Why would any Christian fear death? We are told that death is just a transition to eternal life for those who believe. It is a better place than earth. If you truly believe, wouldn't you look forward to the day when you will finally be with God? Ask yourself what you can do to build a relationship with God so that you trust him completely with your life and with your death. Live in a manner that eliminates the fear associated with death! Live with Christ and die with Christ – without fear.

Do you believe that life with God after death is better than life on this earth?
Are you afraid of death? Why?

What do you think you need to do to strengthen your faith in God and his promise of eternal life?

We, as a general population do not work at strengthening our relationship with God. We attempt to ignore those painful reminders of our limitations. We run from them. We get face lifts, tummy tucks, liposuction, bo-tox, implants, transplants, and go to other ridiculous extremes to enhance our physical beauty. Yet we do not spend one hour a week to beautify our spirit. We invest in the flesh and bankrupt the spirit. When the flesh cashes out, which it will inevitably do, we have nothing to draw upon. On the other hand, those who have been exercising their spirit and building up their account, have reserves upon which to call in times of suffering.

Mary had a strong relationship with God throughout her life. She trusted in Him and in His love for Her. She allowed herself to be comforted by Him. When she was troubled at the appearance of the Angel Gabriel, he told her not to fear. She became calm and accepted that God knew what was best for her. There is no doubt that Mary suffered, not just physically, but

most surely mentally, for the safety of her Son and because of her Son's suffering. Yet, we see that throughout her life, she continued to walk a path of holiness. The suffering did not deter her from God and His plan for her. She trusted in Him and in His Plan.

At the time Mary was suffering, she might have wondered if there was a purpose to her suffering. Jesus could have fulfilled his role without Mary suffering. Yet, 2000 years later, we look at Mary's suffering, and we see a purpose even if she could not. She serves as a model for us. No mother could have suffered more. Yet, her immense suffering did not deter her from the path of holiness. She did not become bitter. She did not turn her face from God. We know that God loved her. We look to Mary in our suffering, and we know that God loves us and walks with us too.

Several years ago, a woman was driving about 30 mph a block from her house in a quiet residential neighborhood when a young teenage driver crossed her path causing her van to flip over. She did not have her seatbelt on. She died. It was a freak accident. She had just run to the grocery store for something. Her family was devastated. She was a good member of the church and a wonderful woman. They wondered why she had to die. Surely, they viewed her death as senseless and without purpose. Yet to this date, when her neighbors get in the car, they think of her and put on their seatbelts. Her death may have saved many lives over the years, yet those who loved her may never know how her death served as an example to save others. There are probably many more ways that her death affected the lives of people that no one will ever know or appreciate except those affected. We simply are too limited to understand the whole picture.

Likewise, at the time Mary was suffering, she had no idea that her suffering would provide a model for us and help us understand that as we walk with God, he is with us, not against us. Every day, we serve as role models for others—our children, our friends, our co-workers and even strangers. What lesson will you convey to your children and others in the way you handle your suffering? Will you teach them to continue to walk with God despite your suffering?

In the case of suffering caused by the finite nature of our bodies and our earthly world, when we ask, "But how can God love me if he lets me suffer like this?" the proper response is: We know that this world is finite. We must accept that and begin to focus on the infinite. We also know how to alleviate the fear associated with physical suffering: build a strong relationship with God ASAP and rely on God for help and comfort. God gives us the tools to heal ourselves and relieve our own pain. You have the power to eliminate the fear associated with this kind of suffering from your life and help others do likewise. How often do you exercise your spirit? How often do you exercise your body? Do you need to outline a new exercise plan?

The suffering caused by others or random acts which appear to happen for no apparent reason or caused by forces beyond our control.

Why does God allow people to hurt us? Why does God allow mass murderers to exist? Why does God allow Hitlers to exist? Why does God allow children to suffer? These are all good questions that can be answered with one response: God doesn't allow it. To a certain extent, we do. God allows men free choice. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts. How does God know if we love Him? He knows by the choices we make in this life. He could have made us slaves with no choice, but he did not. He loves us and wants us to love

Him. We are free to make this choice. We say ‘Yes’ to God or we say ‘No’ to God in the way we live our lives.

He could have mandated that Mary serve as the Mother of Jesus. He did not. He gave her a choice just as he gives us choices. Mary said ‘Yes’ to God. We choose to do good or we choose to do evil. Mary made a choice for good. WE choose to allow evil to exist or WE choose to do something about it. Mary, by making her entire self and life available to God, allowed Good to exist. Do we devote our lives to allowing Good to exist?

When someone causes us to suffer, it is not because God doesn’t love us. He proved His love by *allowing* us to choose and by sacrificing his Son for us. When others hurt us, it is because they have exercised their free will and chosen to do evil. If every time someone chose to do evil and hurt someone, God stopped him, there would be no free will. God’s role in this kind of suffering is not as the cause, but as the one who comforts and holds us when we and others make bad choices. He gives us the strength and guidance to make it through our tests if we choose to accept his help and follow what is not always an easy or convenient path.

Sometimes, we suffer because we, along with the rest of mankind, have failed to proactively stop evil. Is it fair to ask why God allows massacres or holocausts or mass murders (abortionists?) to exist without asking if WE allow them to exist? Do WE allow these things to happen by the choices WE make or WE fail to make? Again, when we ask, ‘But how can God allow this kind of suffering to exist if he is a loving God?’ Again, the proper response is: It is our choice to act or fail to act in a manner that will prevent or promote this kind of suffering. God allows us to control the kind of world in which we live. It appears that we have chosen to live in a world that is eliminating faith from all aspects of public life, that promotes sex, materialism and vulgarity, and minimizes the value of life. Is this what God wants? He doesn’t vote. We do. If Mary were watching TV, which programs do you think she would watch? Which candidates do you think she would vote for? Do you think that she and Jesus would stand up for their faith in public even if it wasn’t the popular thing to do. Oh. Wait. We know the answer to the last question. Do you stand up for your faith in public?

How do we eliminate or reduce the suffering caused by evil and man’s choice to do evil? Over 2000 years ago, Jesus mandated that his followers spread his message of love and forgiveness. He said: ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’ Matthew 28:19-20 What did Jesus teach? ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Matthew 22:37-39. At the last supper, he confirmed, ‘I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. ***This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.***’ Matthew 13:34-35.

How did the disciples go out and teach this lesson? How did they translate His message? Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, summarized Christ’s lessons like this:

Romans 10: 9-21

9 Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good;

10 love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor.

11 Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

12 Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.
13 Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.
14 Bless those who persecute (you), bless and do not curse them.
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
16 Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation.
17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all.
18 If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.
19 Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
20 Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."
21 Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.

He continued:

Romans 13: 9-10

9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, (namely) ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."***
10 Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

We see in the remarkable description in Acts, how those who truly accepted this message lived:

Acts 4:33-37

4:33 With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all.
4:34 There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale,
4:35 and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.
4:36 Thus Joseph, also named by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated "son of encouragement"), a Levite, a Cypriot by birth,
4:37 sold a piece of property that he owned, then brought the money and put it at the feet of the apostles.

Is this how we live? THIS is the message and the power of the Gospel. It has the power to transform lives and the world IF we let it. IF 2000 years ago, every person who heard this message had accepted it and committed to living the gospel AND committed to sharing this message with those he or she knew, what do you think the world would look like today? "There was no needy person among them." All were equal. They used what they needed and provided for each other. They loved each other as themselves. How much pain and suffering is caused because of poverty, greed, jealousy, envy, and hatred? Can you eliminate suffering? Do you have the ability to feed someone who is hungry today? Do you have the ability to help provide housing for those without shelter? How many shirts or blouses do you have in your closet? How many can you wear at one time? Do you have the ability to help clothe someone? Do you have the ability to clothe one person? YOU have the ability to reduce suffering. If you allow suffering to exist, is it fair to blame God for allowing it and not yourself? If you cannot

feed the world, does that mean you should not feed those you can? If Americans only ate what they needed, do you think Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig and the Atkins diet plan would exist?

The Bible says that the greatest thing one can do is to lay down his life for another. When we hear the priest talk about this, as we sit in the pew, we think to ourselves, “Well, if I saw a child in the path of a speeding car, I would jump in front of the car and save the child.” Or we think, “If someone was pointing a gun at my child (or even a stranger), I would jump in front of him and save him. Yep, I would do it.” We know, however, that these scenarios will not likely happen, so we leave mass thinking, “Well, if I ever had the chance to lay down my life for another, I’m sure I would.”

We do have the chance to lay down our lives for others—every day!!!! But doing so is not as easy as “taking a bullet.” It requires that we live for others and not for self- not just for one moment, but day after day after day. This is much harder than taking a bullet. We can lay down our lives for another, but few do. It would truly require that we love one another as Christ loved us. Do you live for others or do you live for yourself? Is there anything you can do to relieve the suffering of even one person?

Reduce someone’s suffering today! Say “Yes” to Jesus now and to His message of love. Truly embrace it and live it as if you believed in the message as much as you say you believe in the Messenger. When someone asks: “If God loves us so much how can he allow people to starve?” The proper response may be: “If you love others as yourself, how can you not share what you have?”

The suffering we accept and embrace because it means that we are moving closer to God and His will.

Right from the start, Mary’s path to holiness entailed suffering and sacrifices on her part. Often you hear that the saints loved suffering and wanted to suffer. How can that ever make sense? There really are two ways to explain this so that we normal non-saints can understand the concept. We are human. We have human wants and desires and passions and temptations. We have all kinds of emotions and feelings that get us into trouble and lead us away from God. In dealing with each of these feelings and passions, we will inevitably have a choice to make. That choice will either lead us toward God or away from God. If something we want leads us away from God and we choose for God, we often believe we are suffering. We feel pain although it is primarily emotional or mental. Nevertheless, it is pain that is real.

Giving up something you want can be painful. Those who consciously choose “for God” like Mary did, are consoled and happy by the thought that their apparent loss of “self” brings them closer to God. Saying “Yes” to God, means saying “No” to self if there is a conflict between the two. If, however, you are on fire with love for God, you look for opportunities to get closer to Him. You welcome the suffering that accompanies self-sacrifice. It means giving up ties to materialism, giving up vices and other non-Christian past-times. These sacrifices, however, while painful at first, with time, will prove to be blessings.

The second way that one might welcome suffering is by viewing it as an opportunity to prove your love for God. When you suffer, do you still act like in a Christ-like manner or do you allow your suffering to act as an excuse for bad behavior? Do you blame God for your suffering and turn from him or do you turn toward him. Do you view your suffering as a

chance to prove to God that you understand the Gospel message? If you need an example of how to cope with suffering for the love of God, you can turn to Mary for that example.

Have you ever thought of embracing suffering?
Do you see any other good that comes from suffering?
Do you see any other purpose suffering serves in our lives?

Finally, you may ask yourself why do good people suffer when apparently evil people seem to thrive and prosper in this life. If God is just, is this justice? It may well be. You have the choice. What would you choose: To suffer in this very short, finite, life and prove your love for God through the way you handle suffering or die embracing the values of the flesh and materialism when it will be too late to make amends? The Bible illustrates the treatment given those who suffer and those who live a lavish lifestyle with no concern for the suffering of others:

Luke 16:19-31

[Luke 16:19] "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day.

[Luke 16:20] And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,
[Luke 16:21] who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

[Luke 16:22] When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried,

[Luke 16:23] and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

[Luke 16:24] And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.'

[Luke 16:25] Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

[Luke 16:26] Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'

[Luke 16:27] He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house,

[Luke 16:28] for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'

[Luke 16:29] But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.'

[Luke 16:30] He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

[Luke 16:31] Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Someone did rise from the dead. Still, most do not believe in the Gospel message or at least, they do not live in accordance with their stated beliefs. In this passage, we picture the rich man lifting his leg to step over the poor man as he comes and goes living his lavish lifestyle. He was unconcerned with the suffering of others. Are there people you ignore whose suffering you could relieve? Are you Lazarus or the rich man? Those who embrace suffering in this life,

believe in the Gospel message and trust in God's love. They view what the world considers to be suffering as a welcomed blessing.

Mary suffered. Mary believed. Mary trusted in God's love. As a visible sign to us that His promises are true, Mary, a mere mortal, was rewarded when she was assumed into God's loving arms, body and soul. We could have believed and/or assumed that Mary's spirit went to Heaven, but in taking her body too, God left no doubt for us. Her assumption into heaven, body and soul, was another beautiful sign to us that if we walk in the path of holiness, we, too, will spend eternal life with the Father. With God, all is possible.

If you suffer, look at the cause of the suffering. You can prevent, eliminate, reduce or relieve much of your suffering and the suffering of others. If you must suffer, embrace it as an opportunity to get to know your Father and deepen your relationship with Him, but don't wait until you are suffering to strengthen your relationship with God. Do it now. Mary's life was a journey of suffering and joy, just like most of our journeys. God accompanied her on her journey, just as He is with us. Focus on identifying the times God lifted you out of your pain and suffering and count those times as gifts to be treasured.

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