



David Seitz, OFS

Come, Let Us Worship

Reflections on the words and prayers of
the Mass for anyone who is wondering,
what's it all about.

“This is really quite lovely: pastoral and filled with faith. I wish Catholics around the country could hear homilies with some of your insights on the Eucharist, sin, prayer, salvation history, and other subjects central to our faith. Your experience in ministry comes through, as does your Franciscan charism.”

Todd Agliandolo, Catholic Answers.

"My friend David's life story could just as easily be my life story... we seem to have walked a similar path. I'm convinced there are more than a few who will identify with his story and now seek deeper understanding. Through careful consideration of these reflections the reader will be drawn further and further into the Great Mystery of our Catholic Mass and thereby draw closer and closer to our Lord. There's nothing watered down here, it's all blessed truth realized through prayerful discernment on David's part. This book is a great read for spiritual discernment and growth after which the sacrifice of Holy Mass will at least be an "awakened" experience or, potentially, a whole new experience for the reader."

Rev. Mr. James Thibodeau, St. Thomas the Apostle, Ann Arbor, MI.

“In *Come Let Us Worship*, David reminds that God calls each of us--- on a journey of a lifetime! By the recounting of his own travels and unique stories, the author invites us to open our hearts and minds to the Risen Lord so that we may see His handiwork and guidance in our lives.”

Rev. Mr. Kurt Godfryd, Editor, CatholicJournal.us

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Dedication

To Karen, who encourages me to write with the sage advice, “if you want to be a writer...write!”

To Kimberlee, Kari, Kelly, Allison, Chelsea, and John, it is my prayer that they will delve deeply into the mysteries we celebrate.

And to all who are curious, confused, longing, bored, excited, cold, lukewarm and on fire, seeking God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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Offer it Up

*“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the Church.”
(Col 1:24)*

I find this to be one of the most intriguing and interesting verses of scripture. St. Paul states that he is making up in his body what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. How can that be? Isn't Christ's passion, His affliction and sacrifice on the cross wholly sufficient? This seems contrary to scripture.

“He died to sin once and for all.” (Rom 6:10)

“He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself.” (Heb 7:27)

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“He entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.” (Heb 9:12)

“If that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice.” (Heb 9:26)

“By this “will,” we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb 10:10)

In fact, scripture teaches *“For no man can buy his own ransom, or pay a price to God for his life. The ransom of his soul is beyond him. He cannot buy life without end.” (Ps 49:8-9)* *“To you all flesh will come with its burden of sin. Too heavy for us, our offenses, but you wipe them away.” (Ps 65:3-4)* *“He bears our burdens, God our savior. This God of ours is a God who saves.” (Ps 68:20-21)*

The writers of the Old Testament understood that only God could save us from our sins. The sin offerings of the Jewish temple were only a prefiguration, a glimpse of what was to be fulfilled in the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins given to the Church by Jesus. The feast of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, was and is very sacred to the Jewish people. On that day, the priest would lay his hands on a goat, ceremoniously placing the sins of the people upon it. The goat was then sent off into the wilderness, symbolizing the sins of the people being taken out from their midst. That is where we get the concept of a scapegoat. We are lost without Christ's redemptive sacrifice. Only Christ could pay the price to God for our lives.

Growing up, when I would complain about one thing or another that was bothering me, my dad would often tell me to “offer it up.” I remember in my early years my dad went through the Baltimore Catechism with me

and my siblings. There were prayers in the books that were recommended for daily use, including a morning offering. The prayer, in essence, was meant to offer up to God all we did during the day for the forgiveness of sins and request the necessary graces to do the will of God.

I never gave much thought to that “offering it up” until I started to study the words of the Mass and what it means to actively participate. The Mass, after all, is an offering. What does this attitude of “offer it up” imply not just in our daily life but in the context of the Mass? It only began to make sense to me when I was able to come to grips with the notion of redemptive suffering. Without that, I could not make sense of the verse from Colossians regarding Paul’s teaching that we make up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

Speculation in a footnote to Col 1:24 in the Catholic Study Bible suggests that St. Paul may have been referring to the Jewish apocalyptic concept that there is a quota of woes and sufferings which would have to be endured before the end of times.¹ This coincides with the book of Revelation, 6:9-11. *“When he broke open the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God. They cried out in a loud voice, ‘How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little while longer until the number was filled of their fellow servants and brothers who were going to be killed as they had been.”* (Rev 6:9-11) In fact, the Church celebrates and remembers these martyrs on the feast days of saints who have paid the ultimate price for their witness. In Preface I of the Eucharistic Prayer for celebrating Mass in their

honor we pray, “*For the blood of your blessed Martyr (name) poured out like Christ’s to glorify your name, show forth your marvelous works, by which in our weakness you perfect your power and on the feeble bestow strength to bear you witness.*”

If this were the only significance of our suffering, to be counted as a filling up a quota of those martyred, I would have a hard time dealing with suffering. When I read that footnote, I sensed that there must be more to it. In fact, I had to ask myself this question. If there is a quota to be filled, then what determines who will be killed and who will not? If I am not one of those to be killed to fill the quota, then what use is my suffering? Is the only value in suffering to be one of the martyrs?

That same footnote gave me a clue. “Paul’s mystical unity with Christ allowed him to call his own sufferings the afflictions of Christ.”² I was able to make more sense of this. Contemplating the Mystical Body of Christ and our unity with Christ, the head, helped me to deal with the seeming conflict between Col 1:24 and the notion of Jesus’ sacrifice being wholly sufficient. It is in this unity of body that our sufferings are joined to those of Christ. Note the difference. Our sufferings are joined to His but do not add to His suffering on the cross. In this sense we suffer “with” Christ and “In” Christ as His body. Redemption is possible through the once for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It began to make sense to me that my sufferings, when joined to Christ, can be redemptive, not only for me, but for others.

Looking to what the Church teaches regarding this joining of our sufferings to those of Christ, I turned to the Catechism, paragraph 1368.

“The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the body of Christ participates in the offering of her head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ also becomes the sacrifice of the members of His Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ’s sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.”³

One concept which struck me was the notion that “She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men.” We pray what we believe. The prayer after communion in the Chrism Mass confirms this notion. ***“We beseech you, almighty God, that those you renew by your sacraments may merit to become the pleasing fragrance of Christ.”***

I love the poetic language that is used. As Catholics, we worship with our whole being, body and soul. Our worship is not just a spiritual worship. We live in a material world and we use the material world to relate to God, just as we use the material world to relate to each other. We use the physical as a window to the spiritual. That is why we use different postures during our worship at Mass. We stand out of respect. We kneel in humility, reverence, and awe. We sit and listen. We engage our whole self.

We are a pleasing fragrance. When the Jewish priests offered animal sacrifice and sacrifices involving the use of incense, these produced pleasing odors. I know some of you may be vegetarian and the odor of cooking meat might be offense to your taste. For me, when I think of my sufferings being

joined to Christ's as a pleasing fragrance I can physically identify with the concept. Throw a steak on the grill and my nose is satisfied. This is also another reason why at times, during the Mass, we use incense. There is no magic involved. It is a physical representation of our pleasing fragrance, our offering, our prayers rising before the throne of God, as we saw in John's vision in Revelation 5:8.

The cross has always been preached as the means by which Christians unite themselves with Jesus. St. Paul proclaimed, "*But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*" (Gal 6:14-15) "*I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.*" (Rom 12:1-2) St. Gregory Nazianzen taught "we must sacrifice ourselves to God, each day and in everything we do accepting all that happens to us for the sake of the Word, imitating his passion by our sufferings, and honoring his blood by shedding our own. We must be ready to be crucified. If you are a Simon of Cyrene, take up your cross and follow Christ."⁴

St. Therese of Lisieux had some wisdom to share regarding our sufferings here on earth. "I know that Jesus cannot want us to suffer uselessly."⁵ She would offer her daily trials to Jesus for the salvation of souls, most particularly those who had no one else to pray for them. She saw her sufferings as a means of saving unrepentant sinners. "I am sorry for people who lose their souls; it is so easy to miss your way when the paths of the world seem so attractive."⁶ She saw the trials in her life as a means of joining them to the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of others in need. This view of suffering is one of the mysteries that sets Christianity apart from

most every other religion. The idea that our suffering can be a benefit for the salvation, not only of ourselves, but for others. When we join with the priest and the assembled body of Christ at Mass, when we through Him, with Him and in Him make the offering of the Eucharist to the Father, we include and offer our sufferings as well. United to the cross, we have a role to play in the salvific mystery. What great spiritual power! Jesus has endowed us with both the responsibility and the power to effect good in the world.

Sr. Ilia Delio, O.S.F., in her book, “Crucified Love”, reflected on how St. Francis of Assisi viewed the role of suffering in our lives. “If the humanity of Christ is significant for Francis, he indicates in several places that it is the Crucified who is preeminent. The Crucified is the glory of the Father and the love of the Father expressed in the Son. To love the Father completely is to become like the son, crucified in love. Francis indicates this in his image of the good shepherd, the one who laid down his life for his sheep...those who wish to glorify God must be willing to follow the good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep.”⁷ St. Francis saw in the suffering Christ the means of redemption and he sought to follow Christ as perfectly as he was able. The result of this continuing, life-long journey to conform himself to Jesus, led to his receiving the stigmata, the wounds of the crucified Christ in his own flesh.

Delio sees the example and life of St. Francis as “one who is in union with the Father in all things and this union leads him to the cross. To be in union with the Father, therefore, means to follow the way of the cross...We must love to the point of martyrdom and death if we wish to attain eternal

life.”⁸ Challenging us to conform ourselves to the cross, which is a participation in redemption, St. Francis said, “it is a great shame for us, servants of God, that while the saints actually did such things, we wish to receive glory and honor by merely recounting their deeds.”⁹

I must admit, I fall more often into the category of one who recounts the deeds of the saints. I have read about saints, especially St. Francis of Assisi, who were pretty harsh on their bodies. They would inflict suffering on themselves as penance for their sins. St. Francis was known to have thrown himself naked into a snowbank and into a patch of thorns to tame his body, which he often referred to as “brother ass.” I have read stories of saints who have worn hair shirts as an act of penance and self-inflicted suffering. It was rumored that St. Pope Paul VI wore a hair shirt throughout the season of Lent. The followers of Opus Dei are said to wear a chain around their thigh with little points that irritate the skin as an act of penance.

I am not one of those who seek out crosses over and above those the Lord sees fit to send my way. I believe there are plenty of opportunities to offer trials and sufferings in the course of our every-day experience. Several years ago, I had an opportunity to take an extended pilgrimage to Europe. I landed in Rome without an itinerary for my trip. I just knew I had a month of days and a rail pass for travel. I intended to visit the Basilicas of my daughter’s confirmation saints. I was able to visit the Basilica of St. Cecilia in Rome, and the Basilica of St. Therese in Lisieux. The one that I could not visit was St. Juan Diego, because, well, I was in Europe, not Mexico. Instead, I substituted St. Damien (San Damiano) in Assisi because

my daughter works for a pharmaceutical company and St. Damien is the patron of pharmacists.

Prior to my stop in Lisieux, I did not know much about St. Therese. I knew she was declared a doctor of the Church. She was Carmelite nun and died at a very early age. Those who sought her intercession were often rewarded with a gift of roses as a sign from the “Little Flower” of Jesus that their prayers would be answered. That was pretty much the extent of my knowledge of her.

I purchased the book “The Story of a Soul”, her autobiography, at the gift shop in the Basilica of St. Therese. Once I began to read the book, I could not put it down. The writing is simple, easy to understand. The spirituality she describes in the book is also simple and easy to understand. That book is always near and available, and I have poured through its pages often. St. Therese, as was discovered after her death, when the sisters were able to read the story of her life, were taken by the quiet holiness of her life. She did not display or radiate an aura of a saint in the making. To the eyes of those in the convent, she was just an ordinary nun with a kind disposition towards all.

I bring this up because the way St. Therese joined herself to the cross and offered her life is something very attainable for all of us members of the Body of Christ, sitting in the pew, participating in the Mass, and then going forth to live out the Gospel in our everyday life. She had no deep theological methodologies and treatises. What she has to offer all of us is simplicity as a means of entering into a deep relationship with God. To illustrate this, one of my favorite passages in the book described her reading and devotional

habits. Outside of the Mass she says “The daily recitation of the Divine Office is a great joy to me in spite of my unworthiness, but apart from this I have not the courage to make myself search for wonderful prayers in books; there are so many of them, and it gives me a headache. In any case, each one seems more beautiful than the one before. As I can’t say all of them, and do not know which to choose I just act like a child who can’t read; I tell God, quite simply, all that I want so say, and He always understands.”¹⁰ When she described her childhood, she stated that the only book she spent a great deal of time with was the “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas Kempis. Her spiritual regimen consisted of the Mass and the Gospels “I am sustained above all else by the Gospels. They supply my poor soul’s every need, and they are always yielding up to me new lights and mysterious hidden meanings”,¹¹ the Divine Office, which we refer to today as the Liturgy of the Hours and spending time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This combined with the offering of her daily trials was her journey to sainthood. Her way is often referred to as the “Little Way” because of the simplicity and ease with which anyone can put it into practice.

St. Therese did not go out of her way seeking to read and understand all the books available to her in the convent, and she did not go out and seek sufferings, crosses over and above those of her daily life. This has become a great comfort to me. The Secular Franciscan Order to which I belong was founded by St. Francis under the name “Brothers and Sisters of Penance.” There have been through the centuries, members of the Order who would treat their bodies as St. Francis did, even knowing at the end of his life Francis apologized to his body for treating it so harshly. For Therese

“Mortification over and above those which came her way in the normal exercise of her duties were not for her.”¹²

We do not have to seek the cross. We can offer what God sends us each day and join it to the cross of Christ for our redemption and the redemption of others. St. Therese reflected on these daily trials. “O God, how good Thou art to temper every trial to our strength.”¹³ “He did not give me this heavy cross until I could bear it.”¹⁴ “How very good God must be to give me strength to bear all I endure.”¹⁵ For Therese, these little every day crosses born in humility are very pleasing to God. They are a means of joining our whole life to the cross of Jesus. “Little crosses give me more joy than anything else. Can a victim of love find anything her Spouse sends terrible? Every moment He sends what I can bear and no more; He increases my strength to meet my pain.”¹⁶ “I can only offer very little things to God. These little sacrifices bring great peace of soul.”¹⁷

In her life of prayer and suffering, Therese made the Gospel her own. *“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (Mt 6:5-6)* “The more personal the suffering, and the more hidden from the eyes of the world, the more pleasing it is to You, my God.”¹⁸ I often wonder when I am at Mass, what sacrifices and sufferings are being offered by those around me. How many pleasing fragrances and personal oblations are being joined with the cross of Christ? How much redemptive work is being carried out right before my eyes, if only I could have a peek into those hidden rooms? How

many simple, yet deeply holy souls are sitting next to me, hidden from the eyes of the world? Hidden because in the simplicity of their lives they do not shout “look at me! I’m saving souls.”

Let me illustrate how the concept of redemptive suffering has made a positive impact on the life of Ben. I met Ben through a parish activity many years ago. He has suffered with depression on and off for most of his adult life. Ben suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome as a result of being attacked and nearly beaten to death while out for a jog in his inner-city neighborhood. He is one of many siblings. Ben is the one who is now living with and caring for his aging father. Stepping into that role is one he was willing to do, as he believes it is the right and just thing to do, and he tries to honor all the commandments. Taking care of an elderly parent was not a choice he agonized over.

Over the years we have entered into conversations in which he has sought me out for spiritual direction. When he opened up, became vulnerable to me, and shared his story I could only be amazed at his personal strength of character. Ben shared that due to the nature of taking care of his father, he has not had the opportunity to have a social life outside of work. Caring for his father is a full-time job in and of itself. He has not had the opportunity to go on dates, to get married and have a family as his siblings have done. He is often frustrated because his siblings do not seem to understand the work that is involved, and they are often unavailable to help. He shared that when he is at work, or at Mass, he sees families together and how it makes him feel sad, depressed that he may never experience what that life is like.

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Ben has always taken great solace in the Mass and often is able to serve as an acolyte. For Ben, serving Mass has been an opportunity to escape from the world for a brief moment and focus on something other than caring for his father. Focusing on the Mass is also a momentary distraction from the thoughts which plague him regarding how his life may have been different in other circumstances.

As Ben opened up to me over the years and began to share some of his more intimate personal sufferings, it occurred to me that Jesus may have called him to be a suffering soul. I know from my experience as a hospice chaplain that when a person is in the depths of great suffering it is not the time to begin a discussion on the meaning and value of redemptive suffering. The Holy Spirit needs to nudge those who are suffering to ask the question, “David, what is it all about? Why is this happening to me? Can you help me make sense of this? Can God really want me to suffer?”

Ben began to ask these questions in our conversations. We began to talk about what he loved most, the Mass. We began to discuss how the Mass is a sacrifice and how we can join, as the Body of Christ, our sufferings to those of Jesus. In doing so, I explained, your suffering and pain can have redemptive value, for yourself and others. Diving into the nature of our prayer as being through Him, with Him and In Him, Ben began to see a way to cope with his suffering. He began to see that his feelings of loneliness must be what Jesus felt when the apostles abandoned him in Gethsemane. He was able to see that he could offer his experience of being beaten to the beatings and scourging Jesus endured during the passion. He began to see value in living as a single person, caring for an elderly parent, after all, Jesus

was a single man and cared for his mother after the death of St. Joseph. Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to the apostle, St. John, before he breathed his last on the cross. Ben began to see that what he is experiencing in his life has tremendous value and purpose.

Ben has shared with me and others how his attitude regarding suffering has helped him. Yes, he still suffers bouts of depression. He still experiences loneliness. He still suffers from PTSD and at times resentful feelings for missed opportunities in life. After all, that is why it is called suffering, it is not pleasant. Ben has been able to re-focus that suffering towards the cross of Jesus, making his own the call of discipleship. *“Then he said to all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 6:23)*

Without realizing it, Ben has been following the way of St. Therese of Lisieux. He has no need to seek out crosses to offer God. God has given Ben plenty of crosses to bear. Ben has become a Simon of Cyrene, carrying the cross with Jesus. I am amazed at the difference I have observed in his life. He has transformed his sufferings and trials into hope; hope for his salvation and the salvation of others in need of God’s mercy. Ben has immersed himself in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

How can we do the same? The bishops have given us a good start.

“When the assembly of the faithful, from the hands of the priest, offers the sacrifice of Christ to the Father, the members of the assembly are called to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. In using the word *body*, St. Paul does not simply mean our flesh and bones, but

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rather our very selves. This, then, is a spiritual sacrifice. How can we do this?

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we hear that Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, made it his Body, and gave it for our salvation. One way of identifying with this is to pray, “Lord, take me. Bless me. Break me. Make me a part of your saving, sacrificial gift for the world’s bodily and spiritual needs. Having offered ourselves to the Father in union with Christ, we practice active participation in the Mass in its highest form.”¹⁹

¹ (Donald Senior 1990, 320)

² (Donald Senior 1990, 320)

³ (I. P. St. John Paul 1997, 344)

⁴ (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship 1975) Office of Readings, 5th Saturday of Lent.

⁵ (Lisieux 2008, 132)

⁶ (Lisieux 2008, 60)

⁷ (Ilia Delio, Crucified Love, Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ 1998, 19)

⁸ (Ilia Delio, Crucified Love, Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ 1998, 19)

⁹ IBID

¹⁰ (Lisieux 2008, 165)

¹¹ (Lisieux 2008, 129-130)

¹² (Lisieux 2008, 199)

¹³ (Lisieux 2008, 90)

¹⁴ (Lisieux 2008, 142)

¹⁵ (Lisieux 2008, 204)

¹⁶ (Lisieux 2008, 204)

¹⁷ (Lisieux 2008, 173)

¹⁸ (Lisieux 2008, 141)

¹⁹ (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2006, 225-227)

It's About Time