

## **Participation in the Sufferings of Christ (16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)**

### **Colossians 1:24-28—Filling Up What is “Lacking”**

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and *in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body*, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. (Col 1:24-28)

#### 1. Crucifixion:

- a. all “the fullness” (Greek *plērōma*) of God dwelt in Christ (1:19)
- b. “all things” reconciled through “the blood of his cross” (1:20)
- b. nothing *objectively* insufficient about the suffering of Christ.

#### 2. Participation:

- a. What is “lacking” (Greek *hysterēma*) in Christ's sufferings?
- b. Paul's *subjective participation* in Christ's sufferings
- c. as a member of his mystical body, “the church” (Greek *ekklēsia*) (1:24).

#### 3. Paul the “Mystic”:

- a. Paul suffers to make known “the mystery” (Greek *to mystērion*) (1:26-27)
- b. Indwelling Christ; “this mystery, which is Christ in you” (1:27).

### **Living Tradition**

**John Paul II:** In this Body, Christ wishes to be united with every individual, and *in a special way he is united with those who suffer. The words quoted above from the Letter to the Colossians bear witness to the exceptional nature of this union...* [quotes Col 1:24] The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption. *This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering.* In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings—in any part of the world and at any time in history—to that extent he in his own way completes the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world. *Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering.* In this dimension—the dimension of love—the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished. Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time he did not bring it to a close. *In this redemptive suffering, through which the Redemption of the world was accomplished, Christ opened himself*

*from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so.* Yes, it seems to be part of the very essence of Christ’s redemptive suffering that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed. (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, *Salvifici Doloris* no. 24 [1984])

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection (16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)**

1. How can Paul say that he—a mere man—is filling up “what is lacking” in the sufferings of Christ? How can anything be “lacking” in the sufferings of Christ?

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**For Further Reading**

1. Dennis Hamm, S.J. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013.
2. Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John Kincaid. *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2019.