

Living in the here and now:  
a retreat for those living with a  
life-limiting/ life-threatening illness





‘We carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10).

‘Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed’ (1 Peter 4:13).

## Joy and suffering EG, n.6

‘Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress:

## Joy and suffering EG, n.6

“My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; every morning they are renewed. Great is your faithfulness... It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save.” (*Lamentation 3:17, 21-23, 26*).





‘From the Heart of Jesus pierced on Calvary, I see a new world coming forth – a great and life-giving world, inspired by love and mercy: a world which the Church must perpetuate on the whole earth’(Sacred Heart 1900).



“They will look on the one whom they have pierced” (John 19:32-37).

‘I live now in faith, the faith of the Son of God loving me and giving himself for me.  
I cannot give up God’s gift’ (Galatians 2:21).





*‘Into your hands  
I commend my spirit.’*

*‘My God, my God!  
Why have you  
abandoned me?’*

When it is said that Jesus must suffer are we being told that we needed to see him love in the darkest place to shake us out of our lethargy and to save us from the futility of being caught up in a meaningless way of life in a desperate search for freedom in all the wrong places.

We do not seek suffering, but if the only way to avoid suffering is to avoid loving, we have Jesus' example to encourage us to love.

His gift of the Spirit makes us able to follow him.





‘When the centurion,  
who stood facing  
Jesus, saw **how** he  
died, he said: Truly this  
man was God’s Son!’

(Mark 15:39)

‘Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [eucharisteô], he broke it and gave it to them saying: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’ (Luke 22:19).





‘Then Jesus did the same with the cup, saying:  
This cup that is poured out for you  
is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20).



‘The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’ (John 3:14-15).

We are comforted for others and for ourselves by the memory of Jesus’ words about the widow. She gave more than anyone else because ‘out of her poverty she put in everything she had, all she had to live on’(Mark 12:44).



# I am



‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that **I am**, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’ (John 8:28-29).



‘Though they found no cause for a sentence of death, those residing in Jerusalem and their leaders asked Pilate to have him killed, but God raised him from the dead’(Acts 13:28-30).







The unjust act of crucifying Jesus was against God's will.

Paul asserts that it 'displeased God'(1Thessalonians 2:14).

Jesus said: 'You kill me because there is no place in you for my word'(John 8:37).

Stephen accuses those who killed Jesus of 'opposing the Holy Spirit'(Acts 7:51).

‘The owner of the vineyard still had one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard’(Mark 12:6-8).



Mark 14:35-36

‘Jesus prayed:  
Abba (Father)!  
for you all things  
are possible;  
remove this cup  
from me.

Let your will,  
not mine,  
be done.’





# The sacrifice of the cross



On the cross Jesus offered his life, his love, his very self to God and to us in order to draw us into communion with God.

To be in communion with God = to be made holy :

**sacrum** **facere**

**sacrifice**



‘They laid the body of Jesus in a tomb.’



**Giotto**



It is natural to find suffering hard to accept. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, however, it is possible to glimpse in suffering a meaning that would otherwise evade us.

In our weakness and suffering, we experience a strength that is not our own.





Ultimately we discover ourselves only in God's love and to enjoy God's love we must transcend our own ego; we must let go of our natural tendency to focus on ourselves; we must learn to welcome and offer love.

It is here that suffering plays its irreplaceable role, for suffering forces us to recognise the basic flaw in our thinking that we are meant to be self-reliant. It forces us to face our dependence and it invites us to trust, for we cannot reach the goal of our human fulfilment except in dependence upon and communion with God.

Suffering engages our psychic energy which drives us to face whatever it is that is causing the suffering and the effects it has upon us, and to listen at every level to what is going on in our psyche as well as in our body.



When we listen, we hear ourselves being asked to let go, and to allow to die something that has seemed good, and perhaps has in fact been good, and to entrust ourselves to the grace that is being offered us in and through the suffering.



For the disciple of Jesus there is a profound sense in which suffering can unite us to him.

Sign of the Cross

Throughout our life many times we have had to 'die' to something precious. Each time we accept to 'die', we experience a deeper communion with God who loves us through our dying, and who raises us up to a fuller life of deeper intimacy. Our fidelity, generosity and courage enable God to keep offering us a fuller life, beyond our experienced horizons. But each acceptance of the offer requires a new dying. This will involve suffering until all roots of resistance to God's love have been burned away (purified) by God's Holy Spirit, the living flame of love.





In his suffering Jesus gives us an example, and by sharing his Spirit with us, he encourages and enables us to follow him along the path of letting go, the path of loving through suffering.

‘If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his’(Romans 6:5).

‘We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us’(Romans 8:17-18).



Perhaps the most wonderful thing about suffering is that, through it, Jesus invites us to join with him in redeeming the world. It is this truth that caused Jesus' followers to find joy in their sufferings:

‘I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and I am completing what is lacking in my flesh of Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, that is, the church’(Colossians 1:24).

‘Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed’(1 Peter 4:13).



‘I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death’(Philippians 3:10).

While we strive, in response to God's grace and call, to be God's faithful servants in bringing about the reign of God here on earth, we recognise that our ultimate homeland is in the love-communion with God which we call 'heaven':

'Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself' (Philippians 3:20-21).



In a future life we are assured of being finally and totally drawn into God's own love-communion, the communion enjoyed by the risen Christ:



2Corinthians 4:6 - 5:4 (3 slides)

‘It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

‘For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh ... We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence ...

‘So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling ... so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.’



Jesus was willing to lay down his life, not to die but to continue in the intimate life of love which he had with his Father. He laid down his life willingly 'in order to take it up again' (John 10:17), and he is encouraging his disciples to do the same, for he has come not that we might die but that we may 'have life and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).

Sharing his life we 'will not die' (John 6:50).

'Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes' (John 5:21).

The power that makes possible the victory of life over death is the power of love which, like everything else, Jesus has from the Father (see John 5:26).



‘We carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body’(2 Corinthians 4:10).

‘Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed’(1 Peter 4:13).



Then suffering itself will be experienced as a grace, deepening our love and bringing about our purification and redemption. Suffering is part of every life. Let suffering be a cross for us who are disciples of Jesus, for then we can embrace him who died there, knowing that he is embracing us.



A Friend broken