

## The Call of Suffering III

September 23, 2018

Last May I went to see my doctor. It had been a long time, and I knew I was in for some bad news. I knew I was an indiscriminate consumer of things sweet and unhealthy. Blood work confirmed I was pre-diabetic. I had been suffering from my eating habits – my body ached, my energy was low. With the official diagnosis, Annie went into full scale “Doing something about this!” And so, since May, I am mindful of what I eat. It has greatly diminished my suffering.

Early in the process, I was in the Crystal Wand, Kokomo’s coolest little shop, (it says so on the front window), and my eyes caught a book entitled “Savor,” by Thich Nan Hahn. He is an internationally known Buddhist monk and writer. In the book he co-authors with a nutritionist, he applies Buddhism’s four noble truths to the matter of nutrition, health, and our nation’s “weight” crisis.

The four noble truths are: 1) life is suffering; 2) There is a cause of our suffering, primarily being that we are way too attached to things and circumstances intended to be temporal; 3) There is hope and relief to our suffering; or we have more power to do something about our suffering than we generally accept or take responsibility; 4) There is a path we can walk, which Buddhism calls the 8-fold path, that leads to non-or greatly diminished suffering.

Within the context of the suffering I was inflicting upon myself because of the way, and the what, I ate and lived, I have been more mindful of my diet.

This morning’s collect and the passage from the letter from James, I believe, is reminiscent of Buddhist wisdom. *“Grant us, O Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure.”*

Within our own Christian tradition, it is recognized that so much of the world’s suffering is because of following our desire to have more and more. We measure our happiness according to our attachment and possession of things external things instead of internal wellness. In the letter from James we read, *“Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your guilty pleasures.”*

All of the great spiritual and wisdom traditions include the caution of placing our happiness and well-being in matters and things beyond the simple gifts of daily living. James wrote, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.” Jesus taught his disciples, “You

want greatness in this life, then put others before you and serve.” The psalmist cries out, “Is your life filled with trouble, and sorrow?” The Lord is near to the broken of heart and spirit.”

So what is this all saying about the call of suffering? Whether suffering comes because of our own actions, or it comes from no fault of our own, it comes to bring us to points of reflection and self-awareness, concerning the manner in which we have been living, or not living our life. Suffering calls us to discern the way we eat, the manner we consume, the attitudes of our hearts toward the simple and precious gifts of daily living. Suffering breaks down the barriers we have constructed through envy, jealousy, and bitterness and helps us realize how our pettiness and our ideologies create factions between ourselves and those we are called to live in community.

It is not only our own suffering that should ring the bells calling us to rethink the way we move and breathe and have our being. Yesterday, I participated in a memorial for a man who was a veteran of the Vietnam War. I was informed by his daughter that he suffered all his life from the effects of the trauma he incurred from what he saw and experienced. As long as the ways of war, the ways of greed, selfishness, hatred, and bigotry continue – there will be suffering. That suffering – whether its brunt fall upon us personally, or upon those we know, or upon strangers from a distant place – that suffering calls us to mindfully consider the actions and attitudes that bring forth the suffering in this world. There is a rising consciousness that challenges the way our own culture requires soooooo much to be satisfied. There is a question being asked, what is the cost of our affluence?

We, as a parish, are being called to share in the suffering being experienced amongst us and around us. As we share this suffering we are called to compassion and renewed mindful awareness of our own lives and the culture we share. May we seek a compassionate and simple way of life, connecting deeply to the rich treasures that cannot be attained through acquisition, but through appreciation, attention, and humility.

### **Blessing - Poem by John O'Donohue**

*On the day when  
the weight deadens  
on your shoulders  
and you stumble,  
may the clay dance  
to balance you.  
And when your eyes  
freeze behind  
the grey window  
and the ghost of loss  
gets in to you,  
may a flock of colours,  
indigo, red, green,  
and azure blue*

*come to awaken in you  
a meadow of delight.*

*When the canvas frays  
in the cradle of thought  
and a stain of ocean  
blackens beneath you,  
may there come across the waters  
a path of yellow moonlight  
to bring you safely home.*

*May the nourishment of the earth be yours,  
may the clarity of light be yours,  
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,  
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.  
And so may a slow  
wind work these words  
of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life... and soothe your suffering.*

Amen