

- Whenever I am going through a period of suffering or turmoil in life, I've learned to turn to the saints for inspiration and courage. For so many of our saints suffered incredible trials and distress in their process of becoming holy.
- You see, saints aren't born; they're made – forged like iron and refined like gold in the crucible of suffering.
- While it's true that all of us suffer in this life, what makes the saints different is their response to suffering. Simply put, they lean into it, rather than seeking to avoid it. And when we turn to them for help in our suffering, they powerfully intercede.
- For example, if your suffering is constant physical pain, then turn to a saint like St. Teresa of Ávila, who suffered with constant headaches.
- If your suffering is a difficult spouse, turn to St. Rita of Cascia, whose husband was a violent and angry man. If your suffering is a difficult boss, turn to St. Thomas More, whose boss – King Henry VIII – eventually had him arrested and killed for rightfully defying him.
- If you suffer with a lack of worldly goods, go to St. Bernadette, who lived through the humiliations of abject poverty. If you suffer with fighting the rampant paganism of our world, turn to St. Boniface, who brought our Catholic Faith to pagans in Germany.
- If you suffer with infertility, then go to our own patroness, St. Ann, who prayed for decades for a child before conceiving Our Lady.
- Truly, no matter what your suffering may be, there is a saint who has shared it, embraced it, and grown in holiness through that same suffering.
- I speak of suffering because in the ancient calendar of the Church, today is known as Passion Sunday. Therefore, with today's Mass we enter Passiontide, the last two weeks of Lent in which we find an intensifying preparation for our Lord's suffering and death.
- Passiontide is generally marked by the veiling of statues and crucifixes as a means of increasing our fasting, fasting even from the consolation these beautiful elements of our church give us.
- The veiling of crucifixes also reminds us of how Jesus was no longer able to walk about freely among the Jews who were trying to kill Him, but rather had to hide at times.
- Yet there is also something very death-like in the shrouding of our statues and crucifixes.
- The veiling of Christ's body on the crucifix is a reminder of Good Friday, when our Lord was shrouded and laid in a tomb by His sorrowful mother.
- Of course, if the Master is hidden, so too must His servants be hidden, which is why we veil the images of saints as well. Veiling our statues is a poignant reminder to us all that one day we will each be shrouded in the veil of death.
- You'll also notice that we will not be using the bells during the Mass. Rather, we will use the harsh clacker, reminding us of the hammer blows by which nails were cruelly driven into our Lord's hands and feet.
- That harsh sound of the clacker is an invitation to us to think about and repent of all the ways we have contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus through our sins. That awful noise is an invitation to contrition, and an invitation to meditate on our own death.
- And so Passiontide helps put into focus the very stark contrast between life and death. It helps us see that this earthly life is temporal and fading, and that someday we will all pass through the veil separating this life from the next.

- As Passiontide leads us into a deeper and more intense meditation on our Lord's suffering, we too are called not simply to ramp up our fasting and penance, but to give some thought to our own sufferings and how we respond to them.
- Of course, none of us likes suffering. Even when, as Catholics, we are aware of the immense good suffering can do for our souls when we accept it humbly, suffering is still difficult.
- And yet the example of the saints shows us so clearly that it is only by embracing the cross that we will ever find true peace and joy! So we must make an act of the will to embrace our crosses, and then pray for the grace to carry them well.
- Just saying a prayer like: "Lord, I embrace this cross you have allowed in my life, and I beg you for the grace to carry it for your glory" can make all the difference.
- Moreover, keep in mind that, while in Passiontide we are preparing more intensely for our Lord's suffering and death, we are also preparing more intensely for His glorification!
- In Passiontide we fast more rigorously and embrace the cross even more tightly so that we might be better prepared for the new covenant of love that will be ushered in by our Lord's death and resurrection.
- This means paying serious attention to our sinfulness, and striving all the more valiantly against our sins so that we might become holy!
- This means not only trying to overcome sinful temptations when they arise, but also by going to confession for the sins we have committed.
- So many times, though, people avoid the Sacrament of Reconciliation, even when they've committed serious sin – and often it's because they are afraid to face God. But our readings today make it clear that we have nothing to fear at all.
- Like last week's story of the Prodigal Son, today's Gospel really shows us what God is like. This week's story gives us some real insight into how our Lord deals with sinners.
- Think for a moment how Christ treats this sinful woman. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who want to stone her, Christ doesn't condemn her. Instead, He forgives her and tells her to go and sin no more. Jesus doesn't excuse her sin; He simply encourages her to stop doing it.
- My friends, this is the God we worship. He is a God who doesn't condemn us, but who is always ready to forgive us when we're truly sorry and ask for forgiveness. And that should give us all great confidence as we approach the confessional.
- Our Lord is not harsh and judgmental, but gentle and loving. He seeks to heal us, to forgive us, and to be one with us. And He encourages to live good and holy lives, putting our sinfulness behind us.
- So while Passiontide is a time of even greater mortification, a time of even greater embracing of the cross, it is also a time of greater hope, for it is by His holy cross that our Lord has redeemed the world!
- My brothers and sisters, in just two weeks' time we will be basking in the glories of Easter – our foretaste of the eternal joys we hope to experience in Heaven. But to get to the glory of the Resurrection, we must first be willing to embrace our crosses.
- May we follow the example of the saints and bravely bear our crosses. May we strive heroically against our habitual sins and faults, and if we haven't done so yet, may we find pardon for our sins in the confessional.
- And in all things, may we see in this special time of Passiontide an opportunity to become more like Christ by imitating Him in our own sufferings, so that we may rise with Him to new life.