

Three Steps to Turn Suffering Into Prayer By Katie Warner

One of the things I love about being Catholic is how deeply we believe in God's ability to bring good out of our suffering. As Christians we believe that suffering has meaning and that God does not let our sufferings go to waste. He allows us to share in its redemptive value when we offer up our sufferings and unite our cross with His cross for the building up of the body of Christ.

The way we take advantage of this "offering up" of the small and heavy crosses in our lives is through prayer. Here are a few ideas on how to turn your suffering into prayer:

First, begin the day with The Morning Offering.

My family recites this prayer every day before my husband heads to work and we begin our day. And it's amazing how now that it is a habit I find myself referring back to the words about suffering in this prayer as I encounter suffering in whatever form it comes in throughout the day.

If you aren't familiar with it, the prayer goes like this:

The Morning Offering

O Jesus,
through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
I offer You my prayers, works,
joys and sufferings
of this day for all the intentions
of Your Sacred Heart,
in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
throughout the world,
in reparation for my sins,
for the intentions of all my relatives and friends,
and in particular
for the intentions of the Holy Father.

If you don't have this prayer memorized, I recommend you print it out (again, it's called The Morning Offering) and start reciting it every morning. Really focusing on offering all that you go through that day to God so He can use it for good.

Second, informally ask God throughout the day to use your sufferings as they occur for good.

So, if you start your day with The Morning Offering it really helps to keep that mentality of offering up suffering as a prayer throughout the day by continual shorter informal prayers as you encounter those hiccups.

You could say something as simple as, “Lord, I offer up this frustration I’m feeling for the consolation of my friend Jackie who has cancer”. Or, “I offer the annoyance of this flu for the strengthening of my marriage”.

In addition to asking God to apply the merits of that suffering to an intention close to your heart, you can also pray that He will use them as He or His mother sees fit for the good of the Church. Your moment of frustration, your sickness, your pain: all of that can have tangible benefit in the lives of others. Some of whom you may never meet. All because you offered those sufferings to our Lord to use for a greater purpose.

Third, follow St. Therese of Lisieux's practice of using sacrifice beads.

Sacrifice beads can be made or purchased and are made up of a string of ten beads with a crucifix at one end (reminding us to follow our call to take up our cross and follow Christ) and a medal of St. Terese at the other end. That reminds us of the importance of following her “little way” of spirituality in which she let no small suffering go to waste.

Keep the beads in your pocket and when you mentally and prayerfully offer up something to God, in union with Christ’s sufferings on the cross, slide one of the beads towards the crucifix. This is a great way to have something physical associated with this prayer practice. So you can see how those moments of suffering you are experiencing are one-by-one being handed over to our Lord.

Since I love so much of what St. Teresa of Avila has written about prayer, I’ll conclude with one of these thoughts from her writings on prayer and suffering she said:

“One must not think that a person who is suffering is not praying. He is offering up his sufferings to God and many a time he is praying much more truly than one who goes away by himself and meditates his head off.”

So, take comfort in the fact that your suffering is never wasted and that it may be one of the greatest forms of prayer that you have to offer to God.