



Chapter Nine

Getting Clarity on the Mission

“In the high-stakes drama all around us, we have each been given a part to play, one that bears our name and no one else’s. We each have the mercy of God to receive, a self to put to death, a Kingdom to gain, a battle to fight and spiritual enemies to slay, comrades to aid, rebels to win over. ... The ancient battle rages all around us, and the adventure we were born for beckons.”³⁴

- Sophia Consulting,
The Christian Cosmic Narrative



THE GRACE: *Magnanimity*



You are the light of the world ... people [do not] light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:14-15



THEMES

The Mission

1. Sabotage and Resistance

2. Reconciliation

3. Re-creation

4. Healing

5. Restoration

6. Ambassadorship

34. Sophia Consulting, *The Christian Cosmic Narrative*, 156.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Please read the reflection “*Two other essential missions: Prayer and Suffering*” below. What resonates with me and why?
- Has my understanding of the mission of the disciple changed? How and why?
- Which mission(s) speaks the most to me?
Why?

As we conclude this chapter,
prayerfully discern how God may be inviting you
now to write the next chapter of His-story.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Two other essential missions: Prayer and Suffering

Any attempt to give an exhaustive description of the mission that Jesus sends us in order to accomplish will certainly fall short. In this talk, we have called attention to six missions, if you will, that the Lord calls us to carry out: resistance, reconciliation, re-creation, healing, transformation, and ambassadors.

There are, however, two additional missions that must be mentioned as we close: prayer and suffering.

First, **prayer**. It is crucial to remember that baptism *really* does something in a person. For example, It really washes away sin; transfers us from the dominion and reign of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son; makes us new creatures; causes us to become temples of the Holy Spirit; incorporates us into the Body of Christ; makes us adopted sons and daughters of God and more besides (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16; Col. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:14-17; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:17; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 1262-1274).

Baptism, though, also makes a person a priest, or, more precisely, to share in Jesus' own priesthood. This is commonly referred to as "the priesthood of all believers," as distinct from the ministerial priesthood. Saint Peter reminds the early Christian community that they are "a chosen race, a royal *priesthood*" (1 Peter 2:5). Peter is talking to all of the people, men and

women, who have been reborn in baptism. The seer in Revelation writes, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Rev 1:5-6). Likewise, the seer is referring to *everyone* born anew of water and the Holy Spirit.

What do priests *do*? Abbott Jeremy Driscoll says, “It is the priest’s work to bring another before God in prayer.” We can do this because we have access to God. *This is amazing!* If you tried to walk into the White House to meet the President you would certainly be turned away, and perhaps arrested! If you tried to walk into your doctor’s office without an appointment, more than likely you would be told that you have to call and schedule a visit. If you walked in and tried to see the CEO of virtually any organization, you would probably be told it’s simply not possible.

But we can talk to God...anytime!

And this is an essential part of our mission as disciples of Jesus. We are all called to stand, sit, kneel, or lie prostrate in agonizing prayer for the world, our spouse, our children, co workers, friends, leaders—everyone and anyone. We are called to lift them up to the One who is Love and desires all men and women to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). We are allowed, invited even, to pound on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the One who has rescued us from Sin, Death, Satan, and Hell.

Priests, however, also offer sacrifices, and this is a second mission we are all sent by Jesus in order to accomplish.

Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, exhorts Christians this way: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:2).

The imagery Paul is drawing on here is rather humorous, even if painful. Sacrifices in his day were usually animals placed by a priest atop an altar to be slain and burned up as an offering to the Roman gods and goddesses. This was done in an attempt to either win the favor of the gods or to appease their wrath. Paul is telling us that we are called to place ourselves on the altar, not to win God’s favor or appease him, but out of gratitude for all He has already done for us and so that we can become holy (the literal meaning of sacrifice). A key difference, however, is that we are *living* sacrifices, which means the body keeps crawling off the altar! Each day we have to choose to crawl back on, in gratitude and trusting in our Father’s great love made manifest in Jesus.

But is there more to this call to offer ourselves as a sacrifice than meets the eye at first glance?

One of the more challenging verses in all of the Bible is Colossians 1:24. Saint Paul says, “I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church.” What in the world is “lacking” in the sufferings of Christ? Does Paul mean to

convey that what Jesus did in going to war to rescue us was close but not quite enough to accomplish all that He came to do? Hardly. The only thing “lacking” in Jesus’ **suffering** is our participation in it.

Now, it must be stated right away, there are two distinct kinds of suffering. On the one hand, there are sufferings we might take on voluntarily, like fasting or some other act of penance; and, on the other hand, there are involuntary sufferings that come to us, like chronic pain or cancer.

As disciples of Jesus we are sent in order to unite our suffering to the cross of Jesus for the sake of the world. This is immensely important since, with regards to involuntary suffering, it’s not a question of *if* it’s going to come to us in this life, only *how* and *when*.

The narrative of the culture at large sees suffering as a waste, of no value whatsoever. Men and women in nursing homes and hospitals, or confined to their own homes, or wherever pain may find them, can be strongly tempted to think that what they are going through has no point, is of no value, and is in vain.

The disciple of Jesus knows a different story. If we had been there on that day we now call “Good Friday,” and seen Jesus on the cross between the two thieves, we would certainly have thought to ourselves, “What an utter waste.” We would have thought that nothing good would come from that.

And we would have been wrong.

Disciples of Jesus understand that he rescued us precisely by his suffering on the cross, wherein he revealed to us the Father's love, made atonement for our sins, and went to war to defeat the powers of Sin, Death, and Satan.

Disciples of Jesus likewise understand that Jesus didn't promise us that if we believed in him he would protect us from any and all suffering. Instead, the New Testament is filled with passages on how we will suffer with and for Jesus before we enter fully into his kingdom (cf. among so many verses Mark 8:34; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:12-16).

However, as it was with Jesus on the cross, so it is with us when we suffer.

It is not a waste, or in vain, or at least it need not be. When we suffer we can use it. And God can do great things through it.

It was once common to hear someone encourage another who was suffering to "offer it up." That can strike us, perhaps, as being a bit passive. Some have found it more helpful, remembering Paul's words in Col. 1:24, to actively unite what they're going through—chemotherapy, a migraine, chronic back pain, depression, or any other way that suffering comes to us—to the cross of Jesus, trusting that one day they will understand how God used this. The important thing is

to understand that nothing we are enduring right now, no matter how painful it may be, need be in vain!

An example of prayer and suffering:

Let me end by offering one final example, one of both prayer and suffering. I mentioned in the video how Jesus used my father as an instrument of healing in my mother's life, so much so that she said to him as he lay in his casket, "Honey, because of you I know who God is." Jesus likewise used my mother as an example of prayer and suffering.

My mom spent most of the last years of her life in intense, chronic pain. Pain is usually measured on a scale of 1-10. Many days her pain was something like a 15. My mother, however, when she was younger, had experienced a miraculous healing, something right out of the pages of the Gospels or The Acts of the Apostles. The point in mentioning that is to say she knew firsthand God's power and that miracles were not confined to the past. She came to understand over time, however, that the same Lord who had once healed her was now inviting her to do the very thing Paul did in his life so many years before: to fill up in her own flesh what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of others.

And, so, my mom, without in any way ever romanticizing pain, learned to pray in a new way, learned to crawl atop the altar out of love for the sake of others. When I asked her about this once, she told me that she said to the Lord, "Jesus, you know that I do not want

this pain and that I so want you to release me from it. But I trust that this is not in vain, is not useless, is not meaningless—any more than your cross was. And, so, I unite this to your cross for...” and then she got the idea to start writing down names of people who were in need. At first it was just a few—my dad, her children, her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Over time, however, the lists grew. She started to keep a ledger of prayer intentions on legal pads beside the hospital bed where she lay most of the day, or on the kitchen counter around which she would walk to ease the pain. It might be a couple she heard was having marital difficulties. A young man who was suicidal and battling depression. A girl who was pregnant and considering an abortion. Leaders of nations. People discerning huge decisions. It was overwhelming to see how many names—and how many legal pads!—there were. Gradually, people began to hear about this. They would ask me, or my siblings, to please ask my mom to write their name, or the name of a loved one, in her legal pads.

When my mom finally died and her pain was over, I had an image of Jesus walking with her, taking her on a sort of tour.

As they walked, He started to show her various homes and they were able to look inside the homes and see the people inside. That couple who had been struggling in their marriage and had managed to stay the course. The young man who had persevered through the depression. The young girl and the child she had chosen to keep. On and on they walked together, and after each house,

Jesus simply smiled at my mother and said to her, “It was by my grace that they were able to do those things. But it was your participation in my cross that made it possible. Well done, good and faithful servant!”

To all of you, then, in pain right now, suffering in mind, body, or spirit, please know how valuable, how immensely valuable, you are! You are the spiritual backbone of those who are out there serving as agents of resistance, reconciliation, re-creation, healing, transformation, and ambassadors. Stay strong! Keep the faith! We desperately need you!