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Why suffer? The Christian Meaning of Mortification

A brief summary of four articles on the meaning of Christian mortification.

03/18/2019

We offer four summaries of articles written by theology professors which try to explain the meaning of Christian mortification.

Imitating Christ (Javier Sesé)

It is characteristic of a person in love to be grateful, to want to respond to love with love; and love is manifested in words and deeds. The greater the love, the more expressive are the words and the more generous and sacrificial are the deeds.

That is why devout Christians of all times have striven to manifest their love for God in words (prayer) and deeds (sacrifice), responding to God's love manifested in his Word (preaching, Gospel, teaching) and his Sacrifice on the Cross.

But it is also characteristic of people in love to want to be as similar as possible to the person loved, to follow in their footsteps.

Javier Sesé is a Doctor of Sacred Theology from the University of Navarre.

What was Jesus' attitude towards penance? (Juan Chapa)

In the light of the tremendous redemptive value of Christ's Death on the Cross, from the beginning Christians understood that suffering and penitential practices — especially fasting, prayer, and almsgiving — were integral to true conversion. Even more, they could be associated with Jesus as a means of participating in Christ's sacrifice and co-redeeming with him. Thus the Church continues to live what St. Paul wrote: "I complete in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24).

Juan Chapa is a Doctor of Theology from the University of Navarre.

Praying body and soul (Jutta Burggraf)

Some things are very difficult to understand, approachable only through faith and love. Why did Jesus Christ die on a Cross? Was this

horrible Passion necessary to free us from our inner darkness? Certainly not. God could have forgiven our sins in a thousand different ways, or simply not at all.

Our Lord has probably chosen the most impressive way of all, the one that most clearly manifests the madness of his great love: He has become a man — just like one of us — sharing the joys and sorrows of our life to the end.

Jutta was a Doctor of Theology at the University of Navarre.

The beauty of the saints and mortification (Pablo Marti del Moral)

Christianity does not seek pain for pain's sake. We understand the mortification of the body best in the image of the saints, in John Paul II's smile of Mother Teresa's peace.

With these two premises in mind, we see that there are two fundamental reasons for Christian mortifications: self-control and self-improvement.

Pablo Marti del Moral is a Doctor of Theology from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

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