

Confirmation II Student Written Assignment in lieu of Youth Rally Participation

Purpose

An 800 word essay to make up for class attendance when ***NOT*** participating in the Diocesan Youth Rally at Bishop Gorman High School. To be completed typed, 12pt font, Times New Roman or Century font, and double spaced.

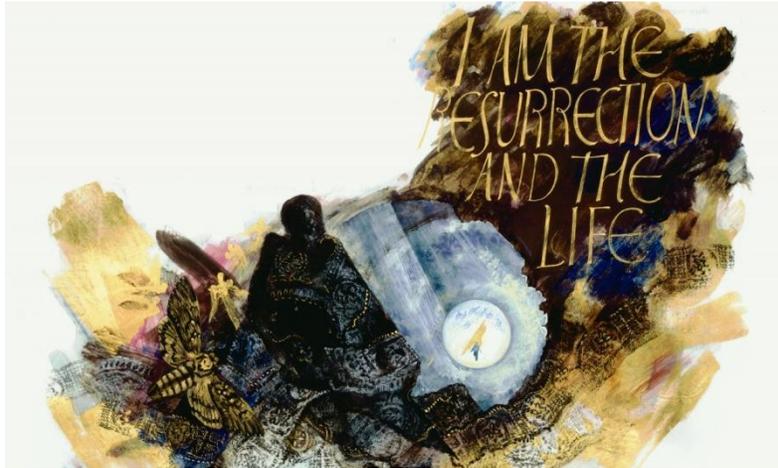
Instructions

Read the attached article and write an 800 word essay which includes answers to the following questions:

- What from the article do you relate with most? Why?
- What from the article do you agree/disagree with? Why?
- Describe a time in your life when something good came in the midst of or because of something bad that happened.
- How has the article challenged or reaffirmed your lived out approach to faith in God?

NOTE: This is an essay. Do not number and create short answers to the above questions, but rather include them in your complete essay response to the article. It is expected that proper grammar and full sentences are used to express your thoughts and ideas. It is also expected that this is completed as an individual assignment, there will be no plagiarism or jointly completed assignments.

REDEMPTION



*"God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living."
-Wisdom 1:13*

Beginning a story is always difficult. As a writer you must capture the reader's attention immediately or risk losing it. Without readers the ideas, characters, feelings, beauty, and inspiration of the written word lose all meaning. So it is with great trepidation that I write these first few lines, because what I aim to share with you, dear reader, is the one thing that I treasure above all things. This message, story, treatise, apology, theology, ideology, philosophy, diary, love letter, or whatever you wish to call it holds within it the entirety of my life. It is the struggle of my deepest depression, the expression of my most passionate love, the celebration of my most radiant joys, and the tears of inexpressible emotion. I choose to share it now because love must always be given away. Thus with great reluctance I had this to you now, dear reader, it is my heart...treat it well.

My story is a story of suffering. I need not dwell on the details for you know the story. It is your story too. The experience of suffering is universal. There is a moment. A loss or betrayal. In that moment there are witnesses. Some well wishers, family members, and a few true

friends. But the moment ends and although they do not intend to, the well wishers move on and only silence is left. Then comes a sense of abandonment, seemingly unending loneliness, leading to despair and depression hidden behind the mask of a hundred-thousand emotionless smiles. All who have suffered know this experience intimately, and all have suffered. Why should the details of my sufferings be immortalized in ink instead of yours? We are sisters and brothers in anguish. The details merely attempt to place reason to the unreasonable.

Yet I said this story could also be rightly called a love story, because it is through my soul's darkest night, that I recognized a dim light. Even a dim light can seem radiant in darkness. It was this dim light that sustained me. Once I began to emerge from the darkness that engulfed me the light emerged with me. Rather than glowing dimmer as the darkness subsided, its once dull glow gradually increased in radiance until this dim light swallowed the darkness whole. In the brilliance of this light I saw clearly for the first time what it was. I do not think for a moment that I have it all

figured out. Far from it! It is clear to me but also unfathomable. I understand it yet am confused by it. To ponder it with seriousness leaves me excited and out of breath. This light illuminates not just the dark recesses of my depression, but of yours too. It is hope, real hope. With this hope came healing. Not quickly, and not yet complete, but the light of hope brought healing into my life, and I pray that you encounter these words while you are in a place of darkness. If today you find yourself needing a little hope than this is for you. If today you find yourself in the company of the lucky ones who are not in need of comfort: God bless you! For he has blessed you abundantly. Honor that. Be thankful for that. Still... Take these words I have entrusted you to heart, for the evil one is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pt 5:8). One day you may need the comfort that has been given me, or your children may need it, or their children.

There is an odd phrase in the Roman Missal that is proclaimed at every Easter Vigil for Catholics all over the world. It is traditionally sung in what is called the *Exsultet*, a prayer intoned to express God's saving activity throughout human history. In this Easter Proclamation the phrase "O Happy Fault" is used to describe the original sin of Adam and Eve. Setting aside the argument of whether Adam and Eve were real historical people in a real historical garden, even a grade school student understands that the sin of Adam and Eve was not a good thing, much less a "happy" thing. Why is it that year after year Holy Mother Church, who claims to hold the fullness of truth, and at her highest liturgy, would proclaim something so blatantly contradictory? In what possible sense could the fall of all creation, the introduction of suffering, and the advent of death, be called happy? To truly grasp the gravity of this statement take a look at how God describes the

consequences of Adam's sin in Genesis 3:16-17

"To the woman he said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it, cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life."

The original sin of Adam and Eve not only brought sin and death into the world, but also division and suffering between people ("I will intensify your toil in childbearing...he shall rule over you"), and division and suffering between people and the rest of creation ("Cursed is the ground because of you!"). Originally creation as a whole is described as "very good". This "very good" from the lips of God implies the fullest sense of "good". Perfect harmony throughout all of creation. No disease, no disasters, no discrimination, no division, no deception, no depression, no distress, no death. That one fault led to all the worst days of my life and all the suffering and death experienced throughout history. It was as if our relationships with each other, and with all of creation were held in unity by a common chain connected to the benevolence of God: a chain of goodness so to speak. That one bad action disintegrated the chain, causing the fall of, not only the singular people involved in the sin, but all of humanity, and all of creation. Enmity replaced goodness. The ramifications of this fault create such a deep division between us and God that it alone has become greatest argument against the existence of God. After all, we think to ourselves, if God were all-powerful he could rid the world of

suffering, if he were all knowing he would know how to create a world apart from suffering, and if he were perfectly good he would desire to do so. Yet misery persists. Thus either God is not omnipotent, or omniscient, or benevolent, and if God is not these things then he is not God. The logic is debilitating, but not near as debilitating as the death of a brother or a parent, or the pain of divorce, or the betrayal of the one who was supposed to be “*the One*”, or the disease that takes away a beautiful 23 year old girl the day after her wedding day, or the countless multitudes who are drowning in depression and despair crying out night and day where is God?

“Everyone is looking for you.”
-Mark 1:37

“Happy” is not the word to describe the absence of God; Hell is more proper.

Perhaps there is more to this story. Like my suffering and yours there are details that are preserved for only those select few in whom we confide. In the midst of my sorrow there were still one or two people whom I shared most every detail. And I pray that there are one or two during your tribulations dear reader. Not so much for their wisdom as for their witness. A witness can testify to the truth of your pain. A witness knows the story even if they do not know the pain as you do. What about witnesses to original sin? There are countless for all have experienced the effects of this fall. But to that first fall, God himself is the only witness. Maybe he is not the witness in the conventional sense, and rightfully so, God is not conventional. However, to those who believe he does give his testimony. It is difficult to ignore the reality of the Bible. You can question it’s authority, authorship, and accuracy, but you cannot dismiss it as irrelevant to history and culture or the problem of pain. It was written over the span of 1100

years with forty or more contributing authors, yet somehow it contains one cohesive message. It speaks of love, salvation, hope, and suffering in one voice. What better place to hear the story of suffering than from the pens inspired by the one true witness to universal suffering? Within its pages are countless stories bearing witness to the effects of the original sin. The murder of Abel, the rape of Dinah, the humiliation of Samson, the assassination of Uriah, the enslavement of the Hebrews, countless wars and deaths, exile, and abandonment. And this is only the Old Testament.

It is impossible to speak of suffering in the Old Testament without mentioning briefly he whose name is synonymous with tears: Job. His record is found in the books of wisdom and studied on college campuses for its philosophy, poetry, and brilliance. In the story Job loses everything in one fell swoop. A messenger comes to him and tells him that Sabeans carried off all his oxen and donkeys in a raid. While he was still speaking another messenger comes and reports that lightning struck the sheep and servants and killed them all. While he was still speaking another comes and says the Chaldeans seized his camels and killed his servants, while he was still speaking yet another comes and with news that the house where his children were celebrating collapsed killing all of them (Job 1:13-19). In four verses Job lost everything he had. But this was only the beginning of his sufferings. He would later be plagued with boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head (Job 2:7). His suffering becomes so great that his wife advises him to “Curse God and die” before even she abandons him. All this in the first two chapters of his forty-two chapter book. The zenith of his tribulation was still to come. The greatest suffering he would experience would come in the form of silence from God. Job cries out for justice and God says nothing. For

38 chapters Heaven is silent. No words of comfort. No end in sight. For untold months Job heard nothing from God. Only the sound of his righteous plea into the void of heaven rang out: "What did I do to deserve this? Why am I being punished?" (Job 7:20). The silence from heaven would remain until after "the words of Job had ended" (Job 31:40). Is this not our cry? Who has not in the midst of their anguish raised their eyes to heaven to shout "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27:46). The problem of evil is not so much that evil exists, but rather that while in the valley of the shadow of death we do not feel the rod and staff of the Good Shepherd that signals his presence (Psalm 23:4). We do not experience him as near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). We feel forsaken, we feel discouraged (Deut 31:8). And the Old Testament ends without an answer, only a vague promise.

The New Testament begins with books called Gospels, meaning the Good News. The Gospel of Luke shouts clearly the reason why Good News is to be heard:

*"I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord."
-Luke 2:10-11*

At last solace from suffering would come in the form of a savior. How would the Messiah relieve our torment? In his omnipotence how will the God-man remove the suffering from this world? He doesn't. Instead he weeps at the sight of it. The shortest verse in all of scripture fell from the ink in the pen of St. John the Evangelist who wrote in the 35th verse of the 11th chapter of his Gospel: "Jesus Wept". The 11th chapter of John records the death of a friend and devoted disciple to Jesus named Lazarus. After hearing complaints from Mary, Jesus wept. In the

midst of cynical accusers, Jesus wept. Why? His tears cannot be for Martha and Mary who miss their dead brother, because he is about to raise him. Perhaps they are for Lazarus who is being brought back into the realm of suffering. No, rising would reveal the Glory of God, and a devout disciple would not lament the sacrifice. Why then do you weep O Lord?

*"I did not make death, nor do I rejoice in the destruction of the living"
-Wisdom 1:13*

Death and suffering do not belong to this world. They are invaders. Enemy snakes who snuck into the garden of paradise while the gardener was lax in his duties. Not with violence and power did they conquer us, but with beauty, goodness, and truth. It was not the fullness of beauty, goodness, and truth of the creator but rather only fragments of his traits, stolen, twisted, and used in perverse ways, for the enemy had no weapons of his own. We freely betrayed God and gave to the enemy the new weapons of sin and death with which we have been dragged into this darkness from whence we cry. We are accomplices to our own damnation. Unable to recognize the real beauty, goodness, and truth of God we lie blinded and bound in this hell that we have created for ourselves. Staring into the mess we have made through our own rebellion, Jesus wept. This is not what he desires for us. He wanted life, we chose death. He wanted peace, we chose chaos. He wanted joy, we chose suffering. Yet, God did not abandon us. Instead he chose to save us.

And now the story sounds like every fairytale ever written by human hands. The white knight has entered to slay the demon and rescue the damsel in distress. It has become the familiar tale of the hero who saves the day by overpowering the villain. But this story does not end in a heavenly war where God commands

legions of angels to battle the forces of Satan. Jesus does not fight with sword and spear to conquer his enemy. This story is no fairytale or hero's epic, nor can it be merely a story written by human hands, it is far too real for that. St. Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologiae says that God "does not destroy nature, but perfects it" (ST. I. Q1. A8). God does not destroy. God creates. God perfects. Thus perfection became incarnate to encounter the forsaken. He baptizes himself into our baptism. Entering into our suffering to its greatest depths, greater depths than we can experience for "wisdom increases suffering" (Ecc 1:18) and Jesus is the personification of wisdom. Even the nearness of a sinner must have been unbearable for the Holy One of God. His resolve must have been great to touch a tax collector, or an adulterer. How could his Holy and Venerable hands withstand the slime of our guilt and shame? Yet he did not simply touch our sin. He took it from us and laid it upon himself. During his thirty-three years of earthly life he gathered up all the sin and the suffering it caused unto himself, seeing our putrid works upon his shoulders we spat and cursed him, and demanded his death. What else could we do when face to face with the culmination of all our wickedness? Those things we wish we had never done. The disgusting and petty habits we want to break. To see it all enfleshed before us makes us churn in anger: Crucify him! Crucify him! And God was put on a cross. Bearing all our sin he experienced a depth of torment that no person born into original sin could know. Under the weight of our sin in the loneliness of betrayal, death, and depression Jesus cried out the very words we utter during our own passions: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?!" (Mt 27:46). Christ falls victim to the greatest evil in all history. Murder is terrible, murder of the innocent is

horrendous, and the torture and murder of the purest and most innocent is unthinkable. Jesus being the most pure and innocent experienced an unjustifiable torture and murder that will echo throughout the rest of history until the end of time itself. And God died and was buried.

By this point in the story you must be wondering "What does any of this have to do with me and my suffering." I wondered that too, dear reader. How does the suffering of one man, regardless of who that man was, have any impact on my own suffering? I do not attempt to claim full understanding, but I do know that God does not destroy, he perfects. You know the close of the story and how on Easter Sunday with the rising of the sun, the Son of God also rose from the dead. Through dying, Jesus created resurrection. Death could not hold him, the suffering he endured was emptied of its power. Rather than destroying death like a conquering hero of fiction Jesus stripped it of its power. He took the sword of the enemy and beat it into a plowshare. An instrument of death turned into an instrument of life. The cross no longer a symbol of death and betrayal. For those who believe it is a sign that death is not the end. Not a mere sign, but a sacrament. For God took on our flesh that we might take on his divinity. Jesus was explicit that this ontological change was possible for us in John 14:20

*"On that day you will realize that I am
in my Father and you are in me
and I in you."*

and he confirmed it on the Road to Damascus when calling to Saul from a vision Jesus spoke these words:

*"Saul, Saul, why are you
persecuting me."
-Acts 9:4*

Jesus did not say, "On that day you will be my followers" he did not say "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting those who believe in me?" After the resurrection Jesus radically identifies himself with those who believe in him. So then to be "in Christ" is to receive all that belongs to him. Now when we hear Christ say "whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you." (Jn 15:16) and "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Mt 7:7-8) and even "Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you." (Jn 16:15) we hear it anew. Jesus says these as in him we too become daughters and sons of God, and this is our inheritance.

This is truly good news! The good news that I have anxiously wanted to share with you dear reader. Already as I write I stumble for the full meaning of the inheritance that we are granted in Christ is more than my words can adequately express. No song, poem, or story can sum up this good news. There is not enough ink in the world to write out the infinite blessings of this union with Christ. So I must now steady my hand and point to one thing. One thing that might help you in your darkest time of need. One thing, that in the midst of your suffering might be light, although a mere glimmer in the darkness, a light of hope that will consume your darkness as it once did mine. The one thing is Resurrection. In Christ all that is his is ours, including his resurrection. When the greatest of suffering was endured by Christ, God redeemed it and gave it new meaning. Death became life. Thus now in him your death becomes life. Suffering and death have not been destroyed but they have been emptied of their meaning.

*Death is swallowed up in victory.
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?
-1 Cor 15:54-55*

The pain remains, but like the foreshadow in the garden, life comes through the pain. We see hints of it in our physical experience. In those who offer their witness, or words of comfort, in those who respond with extraordinary action in times of disaster, in those seemingly impossible reconciliations, new life emerging from death. While only hints of hope speckle the tapestry of our sufferings to the physical eye, their presence points to an invisible hope that shatters our expectation. For Christ's resurrection was the physical proof of the promise, it was not the whole promise. In Christ's suffering and death we receive forgiveness, salvation, entrance to heaven, access to the Father, and a redemption of what was lost in the garden. Now our small resurrections point to a spiritual reality that our sufferings united with Christ also bring forgiveness, salvation, entrance into heaven and access to the Father. This is what St. Paul is referring to when he proclaims:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we

*may present everyone perfect in
Christ. For this I labor and struggle,
in accord with the exercise of his
power working within me."
-Colossians 1:24-29*

St. Paul shouts of the mystical power of our sufferings united with Christ as redeeming as Christ's is redeeming. We can offer our sufferings for the redemption of the souls of others, and in as much as they participate with the Grace of God that has been given them through our own intercessions they can respond to God's work in us Through Christ and crawl through our wounds as the wounds of Christ being washed and made perfect for salvation.

Pain is nothing when you endure it for the sake of another. For those whom I love I would endure the greatest tortures to save them. No amount of psychological, emotional, or physical torment could bring me to wish harm on those I love. Even when that harm comes directly from those whom I love, for we hurt the ones we love the most. When my loved ones afflict me I can still endure that suffering for their sake. Enduring pain alone is unbearable, but like a mother in the midst of laboring a child or a father's broken back and bruised hands to provide for his family, I too can suffer well and even rejoice for I have offered in my long sufferings for you.

May God bless you beloved reader.

May you meet him in
sacrament and in your
heart,

May you hear his gentle voice
calling you his beloved,

May you experience his perfect
love for you through my
imperfect love for you.

Amen.

