

Lacking in Christ?



Question: In Col 1:24, we read about our sufferings “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.” What does it mean that something was lacking in Christ’s affliction? Does this refer to redemptive suffering and, if so, is the service of Simon helping Jesus carry the cross an example of

this?

– **Paul Vanhoudt**, Erie, Colorado

Answer: When St. Paul writes of what is “lacking” in the suffering of Christ, it is only lacking since the members of the Body of Christ fill their role down through time. You and I were not yet born when Christ suffered more than 2,000 years ago, but we were mystically united to him as a member of his body. For indeed, the Lord, who lives in the fullness of time, has always known, loved and included all the members of his body (see Jer 1:5).

And each member of his body has some part in the suffering he endured. As times rolls on, each of his members complete their part, and what was temporally lacking is now filled in. In this way we can see that the Passion of Christ, though occurring at a moment in our historical time, also reaches across time, extending its power to all generations and including the sufferings of all generations who are or will be his members.

Therefore, our sufferings are not redemptive apart from the once-for-all perfect suffering of Jesus. But they do have a redemptive power by being united to it through the grace of our baptism into Christ. As long as we stay united to him, and strive to be free of mortal sin, our sufferings do bear fruit by their connection to Christ’s suffering.

Your example of Simon of Cyrene is a bit tricky since he was

not baptized at the time. If there were some prevenient graces that the Lord gave him in a special way, it is possibly an example of redemptive suffering.

But your example also has a problematic premise, since we are not helping Christ by our share in his sufferings. Christ as Lord does not need our help. Our sharing in his suffering is his gift to us, not our gift to him. Simon of Cyrene is more of an example of how we can help other people carry their crosses.

Mother of God

Question: In a recent homily on the feast of Mary Mother of God, the priest stated that “Mary was not the mother of God the Creator, nor the divine Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit.” From this I deduced that Mary is the mother of the human Jesus born in Bethlehem.

– **Fran Nicholson**, via email

Answer: Mary is given the title “Mother of God” because Jesus is God. It is true, Mary is not the Mother of the Trinity. And she is not the source of Jesus’ divine nature. But Jesus is God, not merely part of God, and in him dwells the fullness of divinity (Col 2:9). Jesus unites his human nature to his divine nature in his one person. We should not divide Jesus up. He is one person with two natures.

Consider an analogy. Although our soul is created directly by God, we are each one person possessed of body and soul. We would not say our mother is only the mother of our body, but not our soul. We don’t talk like that. We say of our mother, she is my mother. This is true also of Jesus: Though he has two natures, they are united in his one divine person. Jesus is God, and so Mary, his mother, is rightly called “Mother of God.”

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