For Personal Reflection

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1. What are the things that cause me pain at this point in my life?
2. How do I experience this pain?
3. How do I deal with pain?
4. Reflect on this verse from Haven't Got Time for the Pain: *"You showed me how, how to leave myself behind, How to turn down the noise in my mind, Now I haven't got time for the pain, I haven't got room for the pain, I haven't the need for the pain, Not since I've known you…"* How might leaving oneself behind be helpful in helping me to deal constructively and positively with the reality of pain in my life?
5. What is most helpful in Saint Francis and/or St. Jane's advice on dealing with pain and its effects?

Further Reading

Live Jesus! Wisdom from Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal, edited by Louise Perrotta. © 2000 The Word Among Us Press, Ijamsville, MD.

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Haven't Got Time…

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

For the Pain?

The American College Dictionary defines pain as: "bodily or mental suffering or distress (as opposed to pleasure); a distressing sensation in a particular part of the body; to inflict pain, hurt or distress." Synonymous with pain are such words as ache, agony, and anguish.

Regardless of how one defines or describes pain, we likely all have one thing in common: we dislike it, deplore it and will generally do almost anything to avoid it.

That said, we likely all have a second thing in common, too: pain—in one form or another—it a part and parcel of our lives.

"Whether helpful or debilitating, pain is a part of life. Francis de Sales is consistently more concerned with how we face, deal with and work through our pain."

Francis de Sales once received a letter from an abbess who was experiencing a great deal of physical pain. His advice to her may be of help to us, too.

"What do you think a bed of suffering is? It is nothing else than the school of humility where we learn all about our misery and weakness, and how vain, delicate and weak we are. And so, beloved daughter, is in on that bed that you will discover your imperfections…"

Pain comes in all types, sizes and shapes. For all its negatives effects, pain can be positive, too. St. Francis de Sales observed: "The turbulence of the sea affects every type of person, even those who think themselves quite well, for, after sailing a while, they discover (through the seasickness brought on by the violent tossing of the waves) that they are not as invulnerable as they previously thought. One of the great benefits of suffering (and pain) is that we come to see the depths of our own nothingness, and that the debris of our bad inclinations floats to the top."

Whether helpful or debilitating, pain is a part of life. Francis de Sales is consistently more concerned with how we face, deal with and work through our pain. For it is how we deal—or don't deal—with pain that can provide a glimpse into something more important: the state of our souls. "Why is it that...we are so surprised, upset and impatient…" when we experience pain? Francis suggests that "without doubt, it is because we thought we were something special, resolute, and steady and therefore….and consequently we are vexed, offended and upset." In short, "we want nothing but consolation in life and are therefore taken aback when we see and experience our misery, our nothingness and our weakness."

"Regardless of how one defines or describes pain, we likely all have one thing in common: we dislike it, deplore it and will generally do almost anything to avoid it."

With an eye to dealing with the emotional, psychological, spiritual—and perhaps even the physical—effects of pain, St. Jane offers the following remedy: Using the image of being in a rowboat, she recommends: "When all our emotions arise to stir up a great internal storm that seems certain to overwhelm us or drag us after it, we must not wish to calm this tempest ourselves. Rather, we must gently draw near the shore, keeping our will firmly in God, and coast along the little waves...let us go gently along with agitation and anxiety and without giving in to our emotions. By doing so, we shall make it to that divine port—with some delay, but with more glory than if we had enjoyed perfect calm and had navigated our little boat without any challenges."

"We want nothing but consolation in life and are therefore taken aback when we see and experience our misery, our nothingness and our weakness."

Albeit in different words, we hear similar words in this familiar song written by Carly Simon and Jacob Brackman: "*Suffering was the only thing that made me feel I was alive, Though that's just how much it costs to survive in this world, 'Til you showed me how, how to fill my heart with love, How to open up and drink in all that white love pouring down from the heaven. I haven't got time for the pain; I haven't the room for the pain; I haven't the need for the pain...Not since I've known you.*"

Not having the time for the pain is not the same as avoiding it. Not having the time for the pain is recognizing the fact that pain is a part of life, but rather than allowing the temptation to avoid pain to consume our energy, we should fill our hearts with love...and, wherever possible, learn and grow from it.