

## Reflection on Suffering

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**I**n the face of suffering we almost automatically turn to God and ask God to remove our suffering. The truth of the matter seems to be that normally God deals with our suffering not by removing it but by transforming it. The sudden dramatic elimination of suffering is not God's usual way, as God's usual way is understood in the Christian tradition. As a number of scripture scholars have pointed out, the psalms of lament in the Hebrew Scriptures are a perfect illustration of this paradoxical healing-as-transformation power of God. At the beginning of such a psalm, God is cursed and condemned for inflicting such suffering; yet by the end of the psalm, God is praised and thanked for freeing us of our suffering.

God speaks to us in our churches, but God speaks just as loudly to us in our health care facilities. The sick and the suffering are a special message from God.

Many people who suffer or have suffered are richer and wiser for it. We want to believe this but we are afraid to believe it. When we are in the midst of our suffering it's almost impossible to believe it, and we resent anybody suggesting such a possibility to us. The fact is that most of us know more people who have been harmed by suffering than have been helped by it. Yet, the potential for significant growth coming directly out of our suffering remains, and it remains a paradoxical truth.

Those who minister most effectively to those who are suffering are usually those who themselves have suffered. They may not be consciously aware of the growth that has taken place, but it has made them much more compassionate. In your very suffering you can bring healing to others. For us Christians, you can paradoxically be at once cared for and caring for, ill and yet life-giving. This is an excellent paradoxical statement with which to end this reflection.



Photo courtesy of  
St. Anthony's Hospital  
Esterhazy, SK

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An excerpt from  
*Reflections on Suffering and Healing*  
by Leo Klug  
Review, Volume 19, Number 1