This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. We know that by His Cross and Resurrection Jesus has redeemed the world. Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why do we have to suffer? Can we find meaning, hope, in suffering? How does God lovingly and compassionately embrace us when we suffer? Jesus suffered for speaking the truth, defining and defending goodness; He suffered for love of us, to "pay the price" for our sins. Can a humane society exist without the willingness of its members to suffer for truth, goodness, justice and love? I defer to His Holiness, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, to answer these questions:

> **The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer.** This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-passion" is a cruel and inhuman society. Yet society cannot accept its suffering members and support them in their trials unless individuals are capable of doing so themselves; moreover, **the individual cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope**. Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. **Because it has now become a shared suffering**, though, **in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love.** The Latin word *con-solatio,* "consolation", expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. Furthermore, **the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie**. In the end, even the "yes" to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my "I", in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. **Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself**, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.
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> To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself. Yet once again the question arises: are we capable of this? Is the other important enough to warrant my becoming, on his account, a person who suffers? Does truth matter to me enough to make suffering worthwhile? Is the promise of love so great that it justifies the gift of myself? In the history of humanity, it was the Christian faith that had the particular merit of bringing forth within man a new and deeper capacity for these kinds of suffering that are decisive for his humanity. The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God —Truth and Love in person—desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvelous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis*[29]—God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*. **Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* man** in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. **Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with* us**; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, **the consolation of God's compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises**. Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials we always need the lesser and greater hopes too—a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds, a favorable resolution of a crisis, and so on. In our lesser trials these kinds of hope may even be sufficient. But in truly great trials, where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth before my own welfare, career and possessions, I need the certitude of that true, great hope of which we have spoken here. For this too we need witnesses—martyrs—who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way—day after day. We need them if we are **to prefer goodness to comfort**, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full. **Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope.** (Pope Benedict XVI, *On Hope*, #38-39).

In a nutshell, Jesus exalted on the Cross teaches us the true measure of humanity because it reveals the ultimate, eternal, gravity of true love. On this Feast Day, we can only bow our heads and pray with St. Paul, ". . . *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*" (Ephesians 3:17–19).

Your Servant in Christ, Fr. Terry Staples

Saint Cornelius

Feast Day September 16
Died June 153 A.D.
Venerated by the Catholic Church in the late Middle Ages

Saint Cornelius, who served as pope from 251 to 253, presided over one of the early Church's most challenging periods, a time marked by fierce persecutions and bitter disputes about forgiveness for Christians who had denied their faith. His papacy is especially notable for his compassionate stance on the Sacrament of Penance, offering hope, healing, and reintegration for the so-called "lapsi" (Christians who had faltered under imperial threat).

Saint Cornelius was a Roman priest, elected pope after a prolonged vacancy caused by the violent martyrdom of his predecessor, St. Fabian, during the Decian persecution. His pontificate unfolded under emperor Decius who in 250 ordered all citizens to offer pagan sacrifices or face death. Many Christians, refusing to renounce Christ, were martyred; others, fearing for their lives, complied with the imperial edict and thus were considered apostates (one who abandons or renounces their faith). When Cornelius assumed the papacy in 251, he inherited a traumatized church and immediately faced controversies that threatened its unity. Chief among these was a schism instigated by Novatian, a rigorist priest who declared himself antipope and insisted that the "lapsi" could never be forgiven or readmitted into communion. Cornelius, in contrast, favored a more pastoral and merciful approach. Novatianists argued that apostasy was unforgivable, a position rooted in an uncompromising view of Christian purity. On the other side, Cornelius, firmly supported by St. Cyprian of Carthage and most African and Eastern bishops, argued that Christ's mercy extended to all who sincerely repented. Cornelius convened a synod of sixty bishops which concluded that repentant apostates could be restored to communion after completing proper acts of penance. This pastoral position was not universally accepted. Novation and his followers broke away, initiating a schism that lasted for centuries in some regions of the Christian world.

Cornelius' resolve to show mercy was further tested as persecutions resumed under Emperor Trebonianus Gallus. He was ultimately exiled to Centumcellae, where he died, either from the rigors of banishment or by execution, thus becoming a martyr for his faith. Cornelius's struggle was not merely political; it was a profound theological debate about the nature of forgiveness, Church authority, and the scope of redemption. By championing the idea that "the Church should reflect Christ's love by offering an opportunity for reconciliation to repentant sinners," Cornelius rooted penance in compassion and the Church's pastoral mission. His moderate and inclusive stance steered the Church away from rigorist exclusivity, laying the groundwork for a theology that prioritized forgiveness over exclusion; a teaching that deeply shaped later understandings of penance and reconciliation. In summary, Cornelius's decisions created a lasting model for the sacramental reconciliation of sinners, emphasizing mercy, penitential process, and the Church's pastoral authority, a model that remains central in Catholic and many Christian traditions.

Reflection: Men like Cornelius and Cyprian were God's instruments in helping the Church find a prudent path between extremes of rigorism and laxity. They are part of the Church's ever-living stream of tradition, ensuring the continuance of what was begun by Christ's infinite mercy and sustained through the wisdom and experience of those who have gone before.