

The hardest lessons we learn come from experience, not from a textbook but. We try to achieve and we learn our limitations. We show our love, and we learn rejection. We trust a friend and we learn betrayal. We can read about those lessons, but we don't really learn them until we go through them. Life is hard.

Today's first reading is a sad song of a suffering servant. Written about 800 years before Jesus was born, this song laments life's hard lessons. It goes, "I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting." But he says, "I have set my face like flint" – that face covered with spit – "knowing that I shall not be put to shame." This servant is not disgraced because God is his help.

When someone makes you suffer, you can fight it or you can take it. In this case, the servant offers no resistance. He suffers physical harm, but he suffers no emotional harm. No enemy can hurt who he is inside.

This passage from Isaiah opens with the words, "The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them." The servant has been well-trained by suffering. He suffered for a reason: to encourage others who also suffer.

Today we remember the Passion of Christ. Jesus got his training in the school of hard knocks. He suffered. But if Jesus was to help us face our sorrows, he had to become a disciple; he had to learn all about what we go through. That is why God became human.

As we enter holy week, we remember the sufferings of Christ. Let us reflect on our own sufferings, and consider the possibility that we have them for a reason: We suffer in order to help others who suffer too.