

## Suck it up!

It has been said that none of us are given more challenges, pain, or suffering than we can bear in life. Every human being is like a container into which a certain amount of sorrow is poured. Hopefully, that bitter liquid will never overflow the container, although at times it seems like the most frail and weak among us suffer from some of the more devastating catastrophes of life? Their containers are small. Their ability to cope is limited due to a lack of resources and stamina. Yet the liquid rushes in like a powerful waterfall. The answer is really quite simple.

God has given every one of us a straw. That is right. We all have a straw. As Catholics, as Christians we are called upon to stick that straw into our neighbors bucket, whether they are at arms length or over a continent away, and suck up some of those problems and worries before they can overflow and drown a person --- or a people in a flood of pain and misery.

The fact is that we all have the ability to do this and we can do it in many different venues. We drain pain with investments of time and resources. There are both soft and hard investments of time. The soft investments can be a simple hug, words of encouragement, or consolation. They are found in the simple presence to an individual in need of understanding, compassion, or just someone to listen to them. A soft investment of time can be realized through prayer with someone or for someone. Hard investments of time deal more with really invading your calendar in a meaningful way and freely providing substantial periods where you are physically and mentally pushing yourself, possibly, but not necessarily, in areas in which you have great expertise, to help others in need. Then, of course there is the sucking on the straw that can be accomplished through financial donations as well as offerings of food, clothing, and basic necessities.

Now even though we all have a straw, many are not aware of its existence. All too often, people have been so blinded by personal wants that they have not been able to put these in perspective in order to see the needs of others. Some are so unaware that when their own crisis erupts they are not able to "suck up" even a portion of it. We are all --- each and every one of us --- **"people of the straw."** The question is --- *"Will we acknowledge it, and will we take it out and use it?"*

I once gave a talk on this topic to the parents at the school I serve and I passed out a straw to everyone. I told them to keep it and when they knew someone else was having a difficult day to simply walk in on them and smile as they clutched their straw tightly in their mouth.

I sometimes think we should start each school year by passing around a cup of water labeled "the issues and challenges we will face," allowing everyone to drink from it with their straw. It would all disappear and none who partook would be any worse off.

Actually when we partake --- when we drink from the cup to help others, we do not become less than we were. We become more than we ever thought we could have been. Call to mind Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Actor Martin Sheen has a saying I have heard him repeat quite often that is applicable here: “*Accept the cup as offered --- not altered.*”

It is good to reflect from time to time on the gentle carpenter from Nazareth who passed the cup asking the twelve to drink and believe. Although his friends did not relieve any real pain or suffering at the moment, or feel it, or even completely understand it, they were committing to something that would eventually lead to glory. And I can not but help believe that, in so doing, they brought a certain degree of peace and joy to the troubled heart of the Lord.

The “people of the straw” are empathic. They take on the challenges and pains of others in an attempt to lighten their loads. I cut off an inch from a straw and carry it around in my wallet as a constant reminder of my responsibility in life.

Perhaps it would be good for school parents to start off the year with a straw and consider the ways they can help each other, the staff, and the children. It is good to remember that the present is a gift we have received. It has been given to us by past generations. Now it is up to us to gift it to the many that will follow us. The question is: “*What condition will that present be in?*” Will it be worn down and in need of extensive repair work? Will it be pretty much the same thing we received --- as in a simple “re-gifting”? Or will it be wondrously improved on?

So exactly how can you “Suck it Up” as a parent in the school?

- You can reach out and help staff in need of assistance
- You can work with students on engaging in “hands-on” outreach activities
- You can donate time and money to your school
- You can just pick up litter around the school
- You can reach out and help students and parents who are in crisis
- You can foster an atmosphere of peace and support
- You can be nice to the Principal!

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