



WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES AND THE HEART SHAKES TOO: The Catholic Faith in the Face of the Catastrophe of an Earthquake | 1

There are experiences that divide life into a “before” and an “after.”

An earthquake is one of them.

In just a few seconds, what seemed solid can cease to be so. A house can become rubble. A familiar street can become an unrecognizable place. A family can be separated. A person can lose everything: their home, their possessions, their work or, most painfully, someone they loved.

And when the movement of the earth finally stops, another, much deeper movement begins: that of the heart.

Questions arise.

Why has God allowed this?

Where was God when the earth was shaking?

Why have some survived while others have died?

Why has this happened precisely here?

What meaning can so much suffering possibly have?

For someone who has lived through such a catastrophe, these are not academic questions. They are questions that can arise through tears, in the midst of fear, before a destroyed home or beside the body of a loved one.

The Church does not answer with ready-made phrases.

The Catholic faith does not teach us to deny pain, pretend that nothing has happened, or say superficially that “everything happens for a reason.” Nor does it authorize us to claim that the victims of a catastrophe have been punished by God.

The Church proposes something much deeper: **to enter into the mystery of suffering with our eyes fixed on Christ crucified and risen.**

Because when the earth shakes, everything can seem to collapse.

But for the Christian there is a truth that remains:



Christ does not collapse.

1. The first thing a Catholic must know: you are not required to understand everything

One of the first temptations after a tragedy is to immediately seek an explanation.

Human beings need to understand.

We want to know why it happened, why a particular person died, why one house withstood the earthquake and another did not, why someone was saved while another person was trapped.

Science can explain many things about the seismic phenomenon: tectonic plates, the movement of faults, magnitude, the epicenter, seismic waves and the factors that determine the extent of destruction.

But there is another question that belongs to a different level:

Why does God allow there to be a world in which such things can happen?

Here the Catholic faith is profoundly realistic.

The Catechism states that the question of evil is “as pressing as it is unavoidable, as painful as it is mysterious,” and warns that there is no simple answer. The Christian response must contemplate the whole of the faith: the goodness of Creation, the drama of sin, the redemptive Incarnation of Christ, the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments and the call to eternal life.

This means something very important for anyone who has just suffered a tragedy:

you can have faith and still ask questions.

You can cry and have faith.

You can be afraid and have faith.



You can fail to understand and still trust.

You can even experience moments of spiritual confusion without necessarily having abandoned God.

Faith does not consist in possessing an immediate explanation for every event.

It consists in trusting God even when we do not yet understand.

2. Is an earthquake a punishment from God?

This question must be treated with enormous prudence.

Throughout history, some people have interpreted particular catastrophes as divine punishments for specific sins. Sacred Scripture certainly contains episodes in which God judges and punishes sin.

But this **does not authorize us to automatically identify a particular catastrophe with a specific divine punishment.**

Christ Himself rejected a simplistic interpretation of suffering.

When people told Him about individuals who had suffered a tragedy, Jesus asked:

“Do you think that those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things?”

And He answers that they were not.

The teaching is fundamental.

We must not look at victims and conclude that they were worse than us.

An earthquake does not give us permission to judge the consciences of those who have died.



Much less should we tell a family that has just lost a child:

“God has punished you.”

That is not pastoral.

That is not charity.

That is not a correct application of Catholic doctrine.

The Catholic must approach the suffering person as Christ approached those who suffered: with mercy, respect, presence and compassion.

3. Physical evil and the mystery of Divine Providence

Here we enter into one of the great themes of Catholic theology.

There is **moral evil**, which proceeds from sin and from the misuse of human freedom.

But there is also **physical evil**: illness, earthquakes, floods, accidents, disability, aging and death.

God is not the author of sin.

And when we speak of a natural catastrophe, we should not imagine God as someone who takes pleasure in causing suffering.

So what does it mean to say that God is provident?

It means that God sustains, governs and leads creation toward its ultimate end. The Catechism teaches that God does not abandon His creatures and that, in His Providence, He can permit certain evils without ceasing to be infinitely good.

Here an essential distinction appears:

God can permit an evil without willing the evil as evil.

And He can permit it because His Providence can bring forth goods that we, from our limited



perspective, cannot yet see.

Saint Augustine expressed one of the fundamental insights of Christian theology with the idea that God is so good and powerful that He can bring good even out of what He has permitted to happen.

But we must be careful.

To say that God can bring good out of evil **does not mean that evil becomes good.**

The death of a person remains painful.

The destruction of a family remains a tragedy.

The loss of a home remains a loss.

Faith does not call evil good.

Faith affirms that **evil does not have the last word.**

4. God's definitive answer to suffering has a face: Jesus Christ

If we want to understand suffering as Christians, we cannot begin and end with a philosophical explanation.

We must look at Christ.

Because God did not remain distant from human suffering.

The Word became flesh.

Christ knew weariness.

He knew hunger.

He knew rejection.

He knew misunderstanding.



He wept at the tomb of Lazarus.

He experienced anguish in Gethsemane.

He was beaten.

He was humiliated.

He was nailed to a Cross.

And He died.

Therefore, when a Christian stands before a city devastated by an earthquake, he can look at the Crucified One and say:

“God knows what it means to suffer.”

We are not before a God who watches suffering from afar.

We are before a God who entered history and assumed our human nature.

The Cross does not explain every detail of every tragedy.

But it reveals something infinitely more important:

God can be present even where we see only abandonment.

5. The Cross and the Resurrection: the Christian does not believe in a tragedy without an ending

Here lies the heart of our hope.

If Christ had only died, Christianity would be a religion of admirable resignation.

But Christ rose again.

That is why Saint Paul can write:



*“We know that all things work together for good for those
who love God” (Romans 8:28).*

This does not mean that everything that happens is good.

It means that **God can lead even what is painful toward an ultimate good.**

The Resurrection transforms the way we look at death.

The Christian does not say:

“Death does not matter.”

He says:

“Death does not have the last word.”

That is why, when people have died in an earthquake, the Church does not merely express condolences.

She prays for their souls.

6. The Catholic must pray for the dead

In a society that often tries to hide the reality of death, a catastrophe places it directly before our eyes.

The Church responds by recalling a truth that must never disappear:

man was created for eternity.

When someone dies, the soul comes before God.

Therefore, praying for the dead is an act of spiritual mercy.

The Holy Mass offered for them.



The Rosary.

The Our Father.

The Hail Mary.

The *De profundis*.

Prayers for the souls in purgatory.

A simple prayer can spiritually accompany those whom we can no longer embrace physically:

**“Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.”**

We do not know what the particular judgment of a specific person has been.

Therefore, we must not condemn them.

But neither should we fall into the opposite extreme of denying the need to pray for the dead.

Charity continues beyond death.

7. And for those who have survived: the wounded soul must also be cared for

Here there is a pastoral dimension that we sometimes forget.

A person may have survived physically and yet be deeply wounded inwardly.

They may be afraid to enter a house again.

They may be startled by every noise.

They may feel guilty for having survived.

They may ask themselves:



“Why me, but not my brother?”

They may experience sadness, anger, silence or even a sense of abandonment by God.

The Catholic who accompanies such a person must be very careful.

He should not say:

“Don’t cry.”

He should allow them to cry.

He should not say:

“You have to be strong.”

He should accompany them.

He should not say:

“God knows what He is doing,” as a formula to quickly close the conversation.

He should often simply sit beside them.

Presence is also a form of charity.

8. Can a Christian feel fear?

Yes.

And this is important.

Christian virtue does not consist in never experiencing emotions.

Fear is a natural human response to real danger.

The moral question does not lie simply in feeling fear, but in what we do with that fear.



We can bring it to God.

We can pray while afraid.

We can say:

“Lord, I am afraid. Help me.”

That too is prayer.

The Psalms are filled with people who cry out to God from anguish.

Faith does not always begin by saying:

“I am calm.”

Sometimes it begins by saying:

“Lord, I cannot go on, but I still trust You.”

9. The prayer of someone who has lost a loved one

There are pains that no theological explanation can immediately remove.

When someone loses a father, mother, child, husband, wife or friend, they do not first need a lecture.

They need to be accompanied.

Theology must be at the service of the person.

And here we must remember the words of the Gospel:

“*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*”
(Matthew 5:4).



Jesus does not say that those who mourn are mistaken.

He promises comfort.

Therefore, if you have lost someone in a catastrophe, you may cry before God.

You may speak to Him about that person.

You may give thanks for having known them.

You may pray for their soul.

You may ask for help in accepting their absence.

And you may hope to meet them again in God.

Christian hope does not consist in pretending that separation does not hurt.

It consists in believing that **separation is not necessarily final**.

10. The Catholic must act: charity cannot remain only words

Authentic faith always leads to charity.

After an earthquake, it is not enough to post:

“My prayers.”

If we can do more, we should do it.

Donate.

Share food.

Offer accommodation.

Help with reconstruction.



Assist the elderly.

Help children.

Collaborate with professionals.

Donate blood when necessary and safe.

Provide financial assistance to affected families.

Participate in parish initiatives.

The Church has always understood that works of mercy are an essential part of Christian life.

A Catholic must not watch suffering from a distance when he has the real ability to alleviate it.

The Christian's hands must become the hands of Christ.

11. The parish must be a home in the midst of catastrophe

In a tragedy, the parish can play an extraordinary role.

It can be a place of prayer.

It can offer shelter.

It can organize material assistance.

It can gather volunteers.

It can accompany families.

It can celebrate Holy Mass for the deceased.

It can administer the sacraments.

It can provide priests to hear confessions.



It can accompany spiritually those who are terrified.

And, above all, it can remind people of one truth:

the Church does not abandon her children when disaster strikes.

Pastoral care must be comprehensive:

body and soul.

It would not be Christian to care only for material needs while forgetting the soul.

But neither would it be Christian to speak exclusively about the soul while ignoring a person who needs water, food, medicine or shelter.

Christ fed, healed, comforted and forgave.

The Church must always learn from her Lord.

12. Prudence is also a Christian virtue

In the face of a catastrophe, we must reject another false idea:

“If I have faith, God will protect me.”

Trust in God does not mean despising safety measures.

If there is a risk of collapse, we must move away.

If the authorities order evacuation, we must evacuate.

If experts recommend certain measures, we should listen to them.

Building earthquake-resistant structures.

Preparing emergency bags.

Knowing evacuation routes.



Helping the authorities.

Following the instructions of rescue teams.

All of this is compatible with faith.

Indeed, it is part of the virtue of prudence.

Faith does not replace responsibility.

Grace does not destroy nature.

It perfects it.

13. We must also take care of our conduct on social media

We live in a new reality.

During a catastrophe, social media can become a magnificent tool for locating people, requesting help and transmitting information.

But it can also become a factory of fear.

Rumors.

Fake videos.

Unverified information.

Invented figures.

Apocalyptic prophecies.

Messages that immediately attribute the earthquake to certain sins.

A Catholic must practice prudence on the internet as well.

Not everything that provokes emotion should be shared.



Before publishing something, we should ask ourselves:

Is it true?

Is it necessary?

Could it harm someone?

Does it respect the dignity of the victims?

Am I helping or simply seeking attention?

In the midst of a tragedy, charity also means knowing when to remain silent.

14. The earthquake as a call to conversion

There is a spiritual dimension that we must not ignore.

An earthquake can remind us dramatically that our earthly securities are fragile.

Jesus used the image of a house built upon rock.

We may have money.

A home.

A profession.

Prestige.

Plans.

Projects.

But all of these can disappear.

Then the decisive question arises:



What have I built my life upon?

Because sooner or later there will be a definitive “earthquake” for everyone: our own death.

And we do not know when.

Therefore, a catastrophe can also become a call to put our lives in order.

Go to confession again.

Reconcile with someone.

Abandon a sin.

Return to Holy Mass.

Recover the habit of prayer.

Pray the Rosary every day.

Place our family under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

Learn again to live for God.

Not because we think the earthquake was necessarily sent as a punishment.

But because **every event that reminds us of the fragility of life can help us recover the perspective of eternity.**

15. “Though the earth gives way, I will not fear”

The Psalm proclaims:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should tremble” (Psalm 46:1-2).



These words acquire extraordinary power after an earthquake.

They do not mean that the Christian will never feel afraid.

They mean that fear does not have to become despair.

The earth may tremble.

Our bodies may tremble.

Our houses may tremble.

Our hearts may tremble.

But God remains God.

16. And when the earthquake is over, another stage begins

There is a natural tendency to think that the tragedy ends when the aftershocks stop.

But for many people, another battle begins then.

Rebuilding.

Finding housing.

Returning to work.

Burying the dead.

Caring for the injured.

Overcoming fear.

Sleeping again.

Entering a house again.



Celebrating again.

Praying again.

And here the Church must remain.

Not only during the first hours.

Not only when cameras are present.

Not only while the tragedy is in the news.

Christian charity must have a memory.

Pastoral accompaniment can last months and years.

Because some wounds take a very long time to heal.

17. A special word for those who have suffered

If you have lived through an earthquake and have lost your home, your possessions or a loved one, perhaps right now you do not have answers.

You do not have to have them all.

If you are angry with God, speak to Him.

If you are afraid, speak to Him.

If you cry, cry before Him.

If you cannot pray, simply say:

“Lord, here I am.”

That itself can already be a prayer.

Do not think that God has abandoned you because you do not understand what has



happened.

Do not confuse God's silence with His absence.

Christ Himself, on the Cross, spoke words of abandonment, and yet He was carrying out precisely there the supreme work of our Redemption.

Your suffering does not mean that God has stopped loving you.

And although you may not now understand why this has happened, you can ask for the grace to go through it accompanied by Him.

When Everything Collapses, Christ Remains

An earthquake can destroy buildings.

It can break roads.

It can separate families.

It can leave entire cities wounded.

But it cannot destroy a person's dignity.

It cannot destroy love.

It cannot destroy prayer.

It cannot destroy charity.

And, for those who live in Christ, it cannot destroy hope.

The Catholic faith does not promise that we will never suffer.

It promises something infinitely greater:



that our suffering can be united to Christ's and that death will not have the last word.

Therefore, the Christian can weep and hope.

He can suffer and love.

He can be afraid and trust.

He can fall to his knees among the ruins and continue praying.

He can look at a damaged church and remember that God is not imprisoned within its walls.

He can lose a house and discover again where his true dwelling is.

He can lose possessions and understand once more that there is a treasure that no one can steal.

He can even face death and remember Saint Paul's words:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

The Apostle's answer is clear: nothing can separate us from the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when the earth shakes again — and when our own securities shake again — we must remember where our true rock is.

It is not in our possessions.

It is not in our strength.

It is not in our ability to control everything.

It is in Christ.



And from that certainty, the Catholic must look upon the suffering person and draw near.

He must pray.

He must help.

He must comfort.

He must offer Holy Mass for the dead.

He must turn to the sacraments.

He must care for the living.

He must remember the dead.

He must rebuild.

He must hope.

And finally, he must place everything into the hands of God.

Because perhaps we cannot understand why the earth has shaken.

But we do know who remains when everything shakes:

Jesus Christ, our Rock, our Redeemer and our hope.

“*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*”
(Hebrews 13:8).

When everything else moves, **He remains.**

Prayer for the Victims of an Earthquake

Lord God, Father of mercy,

we place before You all those who have suffered because of this terrible



catastrophe.

Receive into Your Kingdom those who have died and grant them eternal rest.

Comfort those who mourn the loss of their loved ones.

Sustain those who have been injured.

Protect those who are still searching for their loved ones.

Strengthen the rescue teams, doctors, nurses, firefighters, police officers, priests, volunteers and all those who work to alleviate suffering.

Give Your people generosity to share, strength to serve and patience to rebuild.

To those who have lost their homes, give hope.

To those who have lost their possessions, give trust.

To those who have lost someone they love, give them the consolation of Your presence.

And to those who feel abandoned, show them that You never abandon Your children.

Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows, who remained beside the Cross of Your Son, remain also beside all those who mourn today.

Teach us to remain beside those who suffer.

Teach us not to seek easy explanations.

Teach us to trust when we do not understand.

Teach us to turn suffering into prayer and prayer into charity.

And when our own hour comes, grant us to die in Your grace and attain eternal life.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.