Columns
Spirituality



Pope Francis waves to a crowd of well-wishers at Rome's Gemelli hospital before returning to the Vatican March 23, 2025, after 38 days of treatment at the hospital. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



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Suffering is no match for the modern world. We live in a reality where strength, independence, self-reliance are valued. Illness is seen as an obstacle that must be overcome as soon as possible. Pain is seen, too, as something to be eliminated. The world tries to run away from weakness, but it comes anyway.

It is impossible to escape or suppress it. It comes suddenly, without warning, forcing us to stop. And when everything falls apart, a person begins to ask questions for which there was never time before.

Suffering as a meeting place

It is impossible to plan for illness or prepare for suffering. Sometimes it comes unexpectedly and turns life upside down. But what seems like the end becomes a beginning for many — a new outlook on life, relationships and the meaning of everyday things.

In conversations with those who have experienced pain, I often hear that only then did they see what really matters. Things that previously came first — success, ambition, goals — suddenly become secondary. What turns out to be most important is what is often overlooked in the daily grind: the presence of another person, a look of concern, simple gestures of love.

Love that matures in trial

True love is not revealed in easy moments, but in difficult ones. Just as in marriage, the greatest test of love is not in days filled with joy, but in those marked by pain and crisis. Likewise, in a relationship with God, true love is revealed when he expects trust.

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God does not promise a life without suffering, but promises to be present. He doesn't expect strength beyond human ability, but a readiness not to close oneself off to love despite the pain.

This is the greatest paradox — in the place of greatest weakness we can discover our greatest strength.

Power in weakness

There is nothing glorious about suffering. It is not good or beautiful in itself. And yet, within it, one can find meaning — not in the pain itself, but in what happens around it.

It is in moments of trial that we discover who we really are. Can we love when we have nothing to give but our presence? Can we trust when everything seems meaningless? In the face of suffering, do we close ourselves off, or do we open up to others?

The right words are not always easy to find. It is not always possible to explain, comfort or solve something. But we can simply be there. We can abide beside someone who is suffering, even when we don't know what to say. Sometimes, it is this silence — this presence — that becomes the greatest expression of love.

For the last few weeks, Pope Francis has been showing us his strength while enduring his illness. He is a perfect example of how despite lack of health, love remains strong, in him and in the many people around the world praying for him.

Everything fades — health, strength, life. But love remains.

One can run away from weakness, one can pretend it doesn't exist. But one can also accept it as a part of life — not as a loss, but as a place where what is most important matures.

For it is in weakness that the greatest strength is revealed.