

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

1st Sorrowful Mystery - Jesus' Agony in the Garden.

One of my favorite verses from scripture is the one we hear on Ash Wednesday from the Prophet Joel: ***"Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God."*** In Jewish culture, ***rending one's garments*** is an outlet for expressing grief - a ritualistic way to mourn the loss of a loved one. This Lent I want us to experience the ***rending of our hearts*** by inserting ourselves imaginatively into the drama of Jesus' passion, starting with his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. . As you read, insert yourself imaginatively into each scene as if you are really there and feel the emotions that arise. Let this be your Lenten prayer.

Imagine that you are a disciple of John the Baptist, assisting him at the Jordan River as he calls on people to repent and be baptized. While standing with him in the water, you look up and see a man approach. Suddenly, John notices him and says: ***"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"*** You don't know what to make of it, but after John baptizes him, you learn that he is Jesus from Nazareth and for some reason, you feel compelled to follow him. You meet Jesus' mother and his disciples who soon become your extended family. One night as you lay down to sleep, you reflect on the power of Jesus' words; on his compassion; his ability to heal. You realize that you love him dearly, but there are no words that can adequately describe the love that you feel. It's somehow different.

For the next three years you accompany Jesus everywhere. You can't believe how happy you are. Lately however, you sense in your gut that something is terribly wrong. There's tension among the disciples and in Jesus as well. There's a sense of urgency about him that is troubling. One evening you learn that Jesus gathered his closest disciples for supper. You go to the place and find him walking with Peter, James and John. Catching up you ask: ***"What's happening? Where are you going?"*** Jesus looks at you with love and deep sadness in his eyes and says: ***Come..., follow me!*** You walk at a fast and deliberate pace in deafening silence. Coming to the garden where Jesus often went to pray, he turns and says: ***"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*** Then Jesus walks away. Your anxiety mounts. You don't know what's happening. Peter then turns to you and says: ***"At supper, Jesus took bread, said a blessing, broke it, gave it to us and said, "Take and eat; this is my body."***



“Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to us saying, “Drink from it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYESTRIES OF THE ROSARY

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to us saying, "Drink from it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."

Then with a mix of anger and fear, Peter tells you that Jesus then turned to Judas Iscariot and said, ***"What you are going to do, do quickly!"*** It is all so confusing. You need to know what's happening and why, but you're afraid to learn the truth!

Time passes and fatigue has caused you and the disciples to doze off into a troubled sleep. Jesus returns, awakens you and says: ***"So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."***



"So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Ashamed that you could not stay awake, you just look at Jesus, unable to speak, but then you notice what appears to be sweat and blood that has trickled down his face. Deeply troubled, he turns and walks away again. Finally, he returns one last time to find you and the others sleeping yet again. This time with a look of firm resolve on his face he says: ***"Are you still sleeping? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Look, my betrayer is at hand!"*** Off in the distance you see Judas Iscariot approach with a cohort of soldiers. An overwhelming feeling of dread overtakes you that cause you to flee. While watching from behind a tree, you suddenly start to sob uncontrollably knowing that you abandoned your friend in his hour of need - the one John called: ***"The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"***

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

2nd Sorrowful Mystery – Jesus is scourged

As a way of imaginatively meditating on this 2nd Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary, I ask you once again to insert yourself into the scenes I present - seeing, hearing, feeling all that is happening

Watching from a distance, you see Judas Iscariot and a cohort of soldiers approach the place where Jesus is speaking to his disciples. Judas looking somewhat troubled, walks up to Jesus and greets him with a kiss. Jesus looks at Judas and says: ***“Friend, why have you come?”*** Immediately, the soldiers bind Jesus’ hands and abruptly usher him away, as the disciples scatter, afraid that they too might be arrested. Your heart is pounding in your chest, and the remorse you feel for having abandoned Jesus is overwhelming. Still, you pull yourself together, and with Simon Peter, the only disciple left, you decide follow the callous mob.

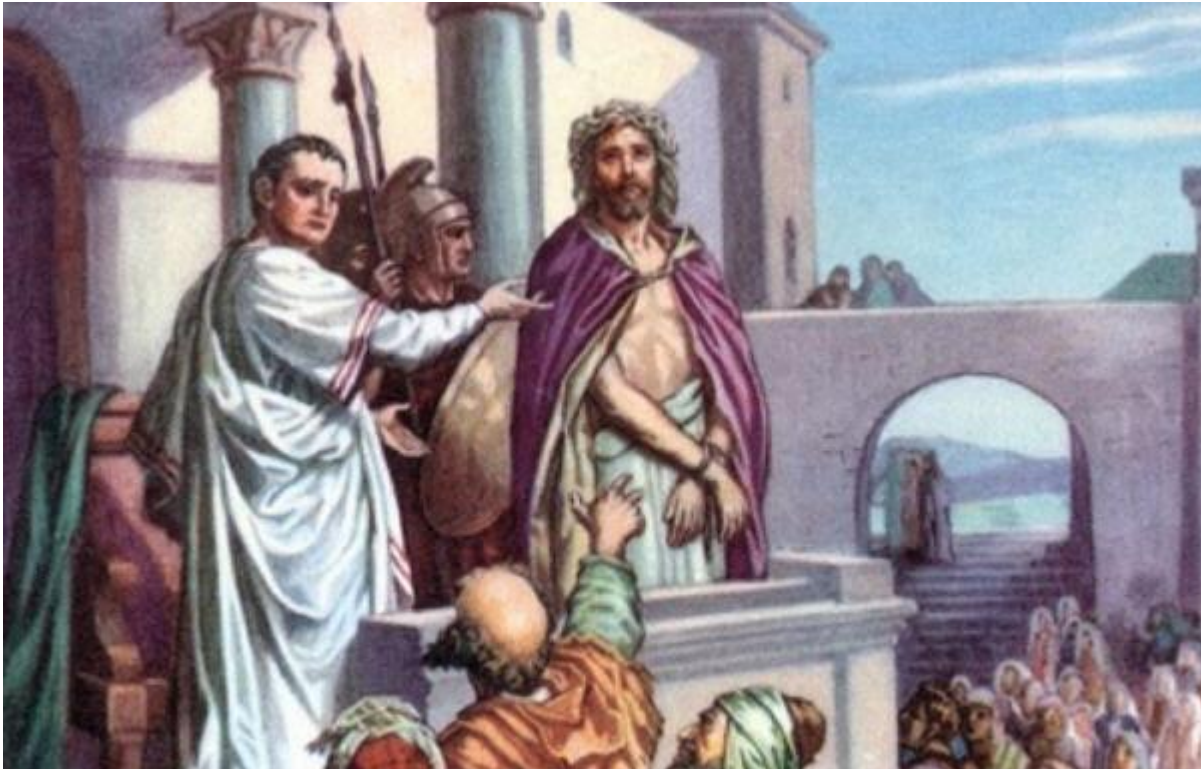


Jesus is Scourged

Arriving at the Praetorium in the dead of night, Jesus and the cohort disappear while you and Peter warm yourselves by a fire. A woman approaches and says: *“You are his disciples, are you not?”* You panic, try to speak, but nothing comes out, and then Peter says: *“No, we are not!”* Shortly thereafter, others approach and ask the same thing. Once again Peter says: *“No, we do not know the man!”* Then one of the slaves of the high priest, asks: *“Didn’t I see you in the garden with him?”* Again Peter denies it, and immediately a rooster crows, upon which Peter abruptly turns and walks away leaving you alone, frightened and ashamed. You cannot however, bring yourself to leave, so you climb to a balcony overlooking the courtyard where Jesus is standing before the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, and an assembly of high-ranking Jewish leaders. Listening intently, you hear Pilate ask: *“Are you the King of the Jews?”*

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYESTRIES OF THE ROSARY

Jesus responds: ***"My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it did, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. Pilate asks: "Then you are a king?" Jesus answers, "You say I am a king. For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*** To which Pilate says: *"Truth? What is truth?"* Then in frustration, Pilate turns to the Jewish leaders and says: *"I find no guilt in him!"* He then orders several soldiers standing guard to take Jesus away and have him scourged.



"My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it did, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.

You see the soldiers take Jesus and lead him to a room outside the temple precinct where they shackle him to a stone pillar. In dread you watch as one of the soldiers takes a whip studded with metal shards and proceeds to strike Jesus mercilessly over and over. You gasp in horror! It's so gruesome a scene that you can't bear to look any longer, so you retreat to deserted corner of the building. Exhausted, you collapse to the floor sobbing uncontrollably as you hear the faint sound of the whip striking your friend, the one who said: ***"For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*** Distraught, Pilate's words echo in your mind: *"Truth? What is truth?"*

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

3rd Sorrowful Mystery – Jesus is Crowned with Thorns

After witnessing Jesus being brutally scourged, you remember what he said to Pontius Pilate: ***“For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth... Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*** Again, Pilate’s response echoes in your mind: *“Truth? What is truth?”* You think to yourself: *“If I ‘belong to the truth’ and listen to Jesus, this same thing might happen to me! What do I do now? Maybe I should leave – that would be the smart thing to do, but is it the right thing?”* You decide: *“No, I am not leaving!”*



Jesus is crowned with Thorns

So you go back to the place where you watched Jesus being scourged and you see him lying in a pool of blood on the floor amidst fragments of flesh that were torn from his body. You stare in horror and think: *“Is he’s dead?”* Suddenly two soldiers return. They lift Jesus from the floor and drag his limp and battered body and place him on a bench against the far wall of the room. You can see that he is still alive – barely.

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYESTRIES OF THE ROSARY

The soldiers are joined by several others who begin to mock him, hit him and spit in his face. You hear one of them say: *"So this is the king of the Jews? He sure doesn't look like a king!"* Then one of the soldiers leaves the room, while the others continue to abuse him. You want to scream at the top of your lungs – **STOP!!!** But you don't, you can't - that would not bode well for you.

After a while, the soldier who had previously left the room returns holding something. He walks up to Jesus and in mock adoration bows before him. Then he turns to his comrades and says: *"Every king must wear a crown!"* Then with cruel force he shoves a circlet of thorn branches on to Jesus head. Jesus recoils in obvious pain, but does not say a word! You feel sick watching this macabre ritual and think to yourself: *"Is this the **truth** that Jesus spoke of - that pain and suffering are the price you pay for doing good, for showing love? It can't be – it just can't!"* Finally after throwing a red cape around Jesus' shoulders and placing a scepter made of reeds in his hand, the soldiers salute Jesus, bow to him in mockery again, and shout – *"All hail, the King of the Jews!"* Then one by one they leave.

Your heart says: *"go to him,"* but your mind says: *"don't!"* You know that if you're caught, you'll be seen as an insurrectionist along with Jesus and could end up in the same dire situation. So you just watch and pray: *"Lord God, if this is your son, if this is the messiah, why are you allowing this to happen?"* Exhausted and fearful, you try somehow to make sense of all this, but you can't. Then suddenly you recall something Simon Peter told you that Jesus said: ***"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me!"*** You wonder: *"Why would Jesus be so specific and say: **'take up his cross and follow me?'**"* Suddenly in that moment you realize what's going on, and you cry out: *"Oh my God - they're going to crucify him!"*



LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

4th Sorrowful Mystery – Jesus Carries His Cross

After having seen Jesus brutally scourged and crowned with thorns, you recalled what Simon Peter told you that Jesus said: ***“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me!”*** You know now that with those words, Jesus was predicting his passion and death. Suddenly you hear a commotion below. A group of soldiers return to the place where Jesus is. Mercilessly, they lift him up and drag him away. From your vantage point, you are able to follow the sad procession undetected.



The sun is rising in the east, and a noisy mob is starting to assemble in one of the praetorium courtyards. Across the yard there's a section reserved for government officials with a president's chair slightly elevated. One by one, Roman officials gather and then the prefect, Pontius Pilot, seats himself in the president's chair. Then Jesus is dragged out and made to stand before him along with another man who looks haggard but defiant. Pilot raises his hand to silence the crowd. He then reminds them that once a year, as a gesture of good will, a prisoner is released to the people. He says: *“Who would you have me free, Jesus, the Nazorean or Barabbas?”* You can't believe your ears, but the mob shouts out over and over: *“Release Barabbas!”* Pilot then asks: *“What would you have me do with the man Jesus?”* The crowd yells: *“Crucify him!”* Confused, Pilot asks: *“Why crucify him? This man has committed no crime!”* The raucous crowd shouts even louder: *“Crucify him!”* Pilot then asks for a wash basin and symbolically cleanses his hands. Then turning to the crowd he says: *“Take him away and crucify him yourselves. I am innocent of this man's blood!”* Someone yells out: *“His blood be on us and on our children!”* You can't believe what you are hearing and seeing. How can these people who only a week ago welcomed Jesus as messiah, now call for his execution? You think to yourself: *“This can't be happening,”* but, it is!

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYESTRIES OF THE ROSARY

In desperation you run from the palace to look for Jesus' disciples. He needs them! You search and search, but they are nowhere to be found. Looking toward one of the gates to the palace, you recognize someone: it's Mary from Magdala, she is standing there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, with John the young disciple and some other women. You run to them, and the first one with whom you make eye contact is Jesus' mother. For a moment, it seems as if time stops. You look into her tear filled eyes, and you say nothing. You just stare at her, as your heart breaks even more than it already has. Then she says to you. *"It is good that you are here."* Then she embraces you, and all you can do is sob uncontrollably as you feel the warmth of her body against yours. You sense that she is protecting you, sheltering you, strengthening you, preparing you for what is about to happen. Several weeks later when you recall this moment, you realize that everything you felt in that embrace was true. Never did you meet a woman of such character, such compassion, such conviction. From that moment on, any time you spoke to her or about her, you called her; ***"Mother Mary!"***

Now from the gate, the most heart-wrenching scene appears before your eyes. Jesus stumbles forward carrying a massive wooden cross. It only took a few labored steps before the weight of that cross became too much to bear, and he falls face first, smashing his face on the cobblestone street. You lunge forward to help, but a soldier pushes you back into the crowd with a menacing look as Jesus' words resound in your ears: ***"take up your cross, and follow me!"*** In tearful anguish you say to yourself: *"I am here Lord, I will follow you!"*



The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery – the Crucifixion

As Jesus is lifted up after having fallen under the weight of the cross, he summons what little strength he has to continue. Numb but determined, Jesus' mother Mary locks arms with you as you walk in step with the crowd following Jesus. In spite of the horror you are witnessing, you feel at once protective of her, as well as protected by her, and there's no place on earth you'd rather be right now. With you is Mary of Magdala, John the beloved and several other women, the only ones among Jesus' inner circle brave enough to stand by him in these final hours of his life. As the sad procession winds its way up hill, Jesus falls again and again, but each time he manages to lift himself up. This last time however, Mother Mary breaks away from you and runs to meet Jesus face to face. Never have you witnessed so heartbreaking an encounter. They speak, but you cannot hear what they are saying. Suddenly several other women come forward. One of them takes off her veil and tenderly wipes the blood and grime from Jesus' face. With an unforgettable look of love and gratitude, you hear him say to the women: ***"Daughters, weep not for me..."***



"Daughters weep not for Me"

Then the soldiers in charge, with no semblance of patience or compassion callously push the women back and force Jesus to continue his trek. Watching this horrific drama is no easy task, but once again Mary locks arms with you. You turn to her and say: *"I am here. I will not leave your side..."*

Finally in what seemed like an eternity, the sad procession arrives at the outcrop called Golgotha. It is here that Jesus will be crucified along with two other men. Jesus can barely stand. He hasn't slept for hours,

LENTEN MEDITATIONS ON THE SORROWFUL MYESTRIES OF THE ROSARY

nor has he eaten since the night before. He has been betrayed by one of his inner circle, abandoned by the rest, incarcerated, interrogated, abused, beaten, crowned with thorns and condemned to death by crucifixion. Exhausted, dehydrated, bleeding and broken, he has carried the cross a quarter mile uphill to this horrible place where he is about to die a most excruciating death. Amidst the jeers and abuse of the spectators, he is stripped of everything: his friends, his honor, left with only a soiled cloak, which in turn is taken from him, leaving him naked and almost totally alone.



"MY GOD, why have you abandoned me?"

As you watch, Jesus is thrust down upon the cross and one by one, huge spikes are hammered through each wrist and then through his feet. You can see that the pain, the agony is dreadful. With each blow of the hammer, Mother Mary grips you tighter and tighter. Then Jesus is violently hoisted upright, intensifying the pain caused by the weight of his body hanging from the nails. You beg God to have mercy and to take him quickly, but the crucifixion goes on for hours. As time passes you notice that Jesus' breathing is becoming noticeably more difficult. His whole body heaves with every breath he takes. As you stand beneath the cross, Jesus looks down at John and Mother Mary and says: ***"John, my child, take her as your own – she will be your mother, and you will be her son."*** You notice that his voice sounded as if he was speaking underwater and realize that Jesus is suffocating; drowning in the bodily fluids that are accumulating in his lungs. Then without warning, the earth quakes and the heavens are rocked by peels of thunder and flashes of lightening unlike anything you ever experienced before. Now barely able to speak, you hear Jesus cry: ***"My God, why have you abandoned me?"*** You look up and with one last agonizing breath, he says: ***"It is finished."***

With love, Deacon Ernie