

WEEK SEVEN

The Suffering Jesus

This week we pray through the Passion of Christ. This is the third phase of the Spiritual Exercises—the Third Week. In the Second Week, we asked for the grace to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more dearly, and to follow him more closely. This love leads us to be with Jesus in his suffering.

The grace we seek this week is compassion. We reflect not merely on the physical pain he endured but also on the emotional, interior suffering of a person who is misunderstood, isolated, rejected, and alone.

The **colloquy** is very important in the Third Week. We speak to Jesus as a friend would speak to a friend. (SE 54) We speak words of sorrow, confusion, compassion, regret, fear, anticipation—whatever moves us. Or perhaps we are present to Jesus without words.

Day One: Agony in the Garden

In our prayer this week we personalize God's saving activity: Jesus endures suffering *for me*. This focus is not meant to induce guilt and to inflict needless pain on us. Rather, Jesus' offering is a sign of friendship with each of us, friendship that sacrifices for the other.

In your prayer, you may find yourself drawn to contemplate your own trials or the suffering of others, whether family, friends, or strangers. This is natural. However, the point is not to become absorbed in our own hardships but to embrace them as a source of compassion for the suffering of others.

The Grace I Seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins." (SE 193)

Read Matthew 26:36-46

For Reflection

From Death to Life

Jesus Christ, may your death be my life
and in your dying may I learn how to live.
May your struggles be my rest,
Your human weakness my courage,
Your embarrassment my honor,
Your passion my delight,
Your sadness my joy,
in your humiliation may I be exalted.
In a word, may I find all my blessings in your trials.
Amen.

— St. Peter Faber, SJ, *Hearts on Fire*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Two: Trial and Denial

Keep your eyes and heart fixed on Jesus. Use your imagination to place yourself in the scene if you like. Note in these meditations how much Jesus' opponents are concerned with self-seeking, face saving, and power tripping. Conversely, notice how Jesus refuses to play their games and instead remains true to who he is.

The Grace I Seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins." (SE 193)

Read Matthew 26:57-75

For Reflection

The Attitude We Should Have



As a preface to his declaration about the Incarnation in Philippians, St. Paul said, "The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had."

Wisdom is making peace with the unchangeable. We have the freedom to face the unavoidable with dignity, to understand the transformational value that attitude works on suffering. Viktor Frankl wrote that in concentration camps, "what alone remains is 'the last of human freedoms' – the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of

circumstances.” What Frankl asked is not optimism in the face of pessimism, but hope in the face of hopelessness.

Are we responsible for our unmerited suffering? The answer is no. And yes. We are not responsible for our predicament as its cause – whether it be cancer or job loss or the death of a child or spouse. But we are responsible for what we do with the effects, for what we build from the rubble that fate has made of our lives.

– Excerpted from *God – The Oldest Question* by William J. O’Malley, SJ

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Three: Crowning with Thorns

In the Third Week of the Exercises, Ignatius invites us to consider how Jesus' divinity "hides itself." (SE 196) We must not easily explain away the suffering we encounter. Jesus is not merely playacting his way through a passion play. We must take Jesus' humanity seriously enough to realize just how much he loves us. He remains faithful to his Father and the mission of the kingdom and accepts the very real consequences of that faithful obedience, which he does out of great love.

The Grace I Seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for sorrow, regret, and confusion, because the Lord is going to his Passion for my sins." (SE 193)

Read Matthew 27:26-31

For Reflection

Where is our God in suffering? We Christians do not have a fully satisfying explanation for why the world contains so much suffering. But we have something better: we have the power to deal with the suffering. We know where our God is during suffering. Our God is with us: with the Jewish boy on the gallows, with Ivan Ilyich in sickness, with Job in adversity, with Paul in weakness and persecution, with Jesus in crucifixion – with us in all the senseless accidents and ruptured relationships and interior brokenness of our lives.

– Richard Hauser, SJ, *Finding God in Troubled Times*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Four: The Way of the Cross

As you pray through the Passion and ask for the grace of compassion, consider how you are called to be more compassionate in the particulars of your own life. Ask: *What invisible crosses do people bear? How can I help carry them? Who helps carry my own burdens? Who are the crucified peoples of our world today?*

The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me.” (SE 203)

Read Luke 23:26-32

For Reflection

We experience various “dyings,” losses of different kinds, and we must mourn them: the death of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, the change of a career or living situation, a physical infirmity or limitation. We unite these dyings with the suffering of Christ, knowing that God redeems all. Recall a line from the contemporary version of the *Anima Christi*: “On each of my dyings, shed your light and your love.”

– Kevin O’Brien, SJ

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Five: The Beginning of the Passion

We will read Mark's account of Jesus' Passion over the next two days. Pray these Scriptures straight through or linger over them. Use imaginative prayer to immerse yourself in these events.

The Grace I Seek

"I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me." (SE 203)

Read

Pray the first half of the Passion, Mark 14:12-72.

For Reflection

The Language of the Cross



Some suggestions given by Master Ignatius for praying on Jesus' passion help bring it into the ordinary days of our life. We begin, as in any other contemplation, by asking who is present, what they are saying, and what they are doing. But we go on to do three things: We consider what Jesus suffered in his humanity and "what he wanted to suffer." We consider how the divinity hid himself, not intervening. And then we beg to appreciate that Jesus did this for us.

The Human Part of Jesus' Suffering

Jesus' brutal physical sufferings can be painted and sculpted, but it is not so easy to put the human part of what he suffered into words. Perhaps we have to start with this: Jesus was the victim of political and religious abuses. His murder was politically inane, because in the long run the abuse of political power with violence wipes out what it pretends to achieve: right order. Then again, his execution was religiously senseless, because right from the start violent religious persecution destroys the holiness of the persecutor, and holiness is what religion is about. So Jesus suffered an inane and senseless horror, an experience only too many of us are familiar with today. This is

what he “wanted to suffer:” to live to the very end in solidarity with humankind, familiar with inanity and meaninglessness.

Jesus suffered as we all suffer. Each one of us, when we suffer bitterly, can hardly believe that there exists any suffering like our own. But suffering is like language: my words are not merely mine; however much I have made them my own, they belong to all of us. Suffering is among us, and no suffering is any one person’s possession. I can talk about “my” cancer, but many others around me are suffering with it, too.

None of us is at all likely to suffer the physical torture that Jesus suffered (God grant this freedom to us all). But each one of us inescapably suffers physical pains and decay. This human suffering that afflicts all of us is what Jesus wanted to suffer. He was no masochist. He chose to embrace even bitter suffering so that he could be like us in everything – except sin – and by his obedience turn the whole of human experience from its journey into death and onto the way of eternal life.

Jesus Refused to Suffer Despair

Master Ignatius tells the one praying on Jesus’ passion to “begin with great effort to strive to grieve, be sad, and weep.” It is never easy to suffer, and it is particularly difficult to enter into another’s suffering. We have to work to grasp that Jesus, on his cross, knew the terrifying vacuum of God’s hiding and leaving him to the merciless experiences that scotch life. Most of us will sink into that dreadful feeling at some point in the chaos of our world.

Despair is a choice just as much as hope is a choice, and Jesus did not suffer despair because he refused to. He trusted that the Father would save him; he said more than once that he would die and that he expected to rise from the dead. On the cross, he trusted that his suffering made some kind of sense, to be revealed when the Father chose. Every day of his human life, he wanted to do whatever he could to alleviate the suffering of those around him. But he was thwarted. He had to die in the hope that he would live again in our flesh.

Jesus’ Passion Brings Us to Embrace the World as it Really Is

Those who really do know and love him will suffer this way, his way. They will also see the suffering of all the people whom God puts in their life and strive with great effort to grieve with them and do whatever they can to alleviate their suffering. Right here is the deepest spiritual root of the impulse to work for peace and justice. Anything less would be an unworthy motive for those who love Jesus Christ.

Jesus' passion brings us to embrace the world as it really is: full of violence and pain. We refuse to let religion and grace become an easy analgesic, buffering us from the real sufferings around us. Instead, we embrace whatever suffering comes into our lives as no longer senseless. Our suffering has a meaning in "the language of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). We join the sufferings of the crucified Christ, the sufferings of humankind that he chose to embrace. We cling to Jesus, to "a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). When we do less, we are using our faith in Christ as a pain pill.

– Excerpt from *Making Choices in Christ* by Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Six: The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me.” (SE 203)

Read

Pray the second half of the Passion, Mark 15:1-47.

For Reflection

Colloquy before Christ Crucified

I put myself before Jesus Christ our Lord, present before me on the cross.

I talk to him about how he creates because he loves and then he is born one like us out of love, so emptying himself as to pass from eternal life to death here in time, even death on a cross. By his response of love for God his Father, he dies for my sins.

I look to myself and ask—just letting the questions penetrate my being:

In the past, what response have I made to Christ?

How do I respond to Christ now?

What response should I make to Christ?

As I look upon Jesus as he hangs upon the cross, I ponder whatever God may bring to my attention. (SE 53)

—Contemporary translation by David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Seven: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

In this Holy Saturday moment, we wait in stillness, loss, and longing. Try to find stillness of soul today.

The Grace I Seek

“I ask for what I desire. Here it is what is proper for the Passion: sorrow with Christ in sorrow; a broken spirit with Christ so broken; tears; and interior suffering because of the great suffering which Christ endured for me.” (SE 203)

Read Luke 23:50-56

For Reflection

Read Philippians 2:1-11 (one of the most ancient hymns to Jesus Christ in the Bible): *Plea for Unity and Humility*.

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

