


Recognising
GOOD FRIDAY
amongst us



My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

March 30, 2018

The Emmaus Centre
Swords, Dublin, K67Y274

*Thanks to Br. Jim Donovan, Monica O'Reilly, Vivek da Silva, Br. Donal Leader and Aiveen Mullally for the reflections
and thanks to  VERITAS www.veritas.ie for its help with the printing of this booklet.*

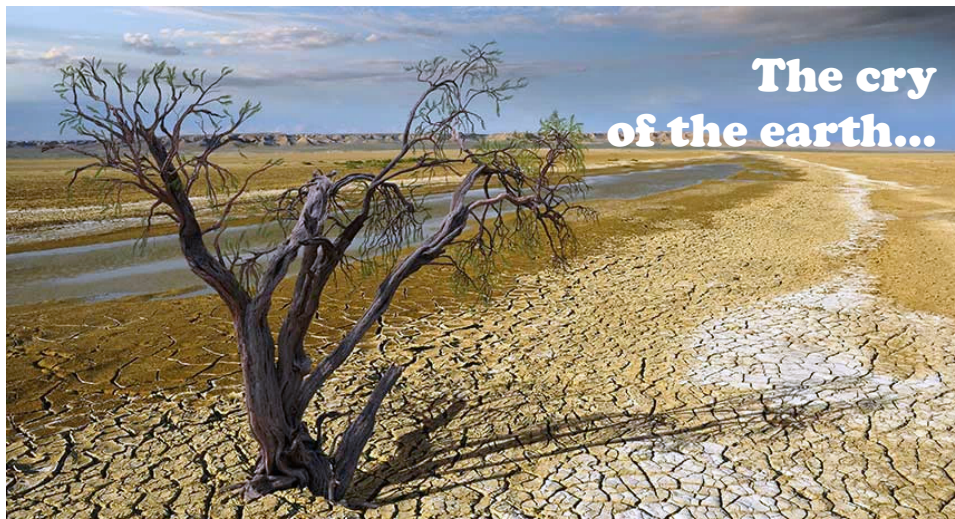


My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

On Good Friday, we hear Jesus crying out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” John Dominic Crossan and other contemporary scholars who study the historical Jesus describe how he went about preaching how God would soon bring about the dream for a world at peace, without exploitation, violence, or hatred. But that did not happen. Instead, he found himself confronted by betrayal, rejection of what he stood for, and vilified as a ‘false prophet’. Arrested by Pilate, condemned by the Sanhedrin, brutally tortured, abandoned by friends and disciples, Jesus drank bitterly from the cup of failure. In that moment, Jesus experienced God’s absence, not God’s presence. It is that experience of desolation when one’s life-project sunders before one’s eyes. For Jesus, for whom the God of Israel, whom he called “Father” was his ultimate refuge and source of hope, this was his dark place, his dark night of the soul.

We, too, may feel strongly something of that sense of God’s absence. In those moments we experience deep inner desolation and alienation. Almost nothing can console us, neither physical pleasures nor uplifting moments nor the companionship of friends. We may not even have friends in such moments because people don’t wish to be around us in our suffering. This is the heart of the experience of Good Friday; it is a time we have set aside each year to confront the daily horrors from which we recoil and the inescapable public reality of human suffering and injustice.

(From: *God’s Absence*, a reflection by Br. Donal Leader)



Pope Francis in Laudato Si' reminds us that the earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail".[#2]

‘We are living in a time of ecological devastation, in which our materialistic culture has had a catastrophic effect on the ecosystem. Our rivers are toxic, the rainforests slashed and burned, vast tracts of land made a wasteland due to our insatiable desires for oil, gas and minerals. We have raped and pillaged and polluted the earth until it is in a dangerous state of imbalance we call climate change. If we dare to listen, creation itself is now calling to us, sending us signs of its imbalance. We can see these signs in the increasing floods and droughts, cyclones and hurricanes, forest fires and unprecedented snowfall, mudslides and avalanches, and those whose hearts are open may hear the cry of the world, of the spiritual being of our mother the earth. It is a cry of need and despair, that humanity who was supposed to be the guardian of the planet has forgotten its responsibility and instead desecrates and destroys the earth on a global scale.

There are many ways to pray for the earth. It can be helpful first to acknowledge that it is not “unfeeling matter” but a living being that has given us life. And then we can sense its suffering: the physical suffering we see in the dying species and polluted waters, the deeper suffering of our collective disregard for its sacred nature.

Sometimes it is easier to pray when we feel the earth in our hands, when we work in the garden tending our flowers or vegetables. Or when we cook, preparing the vegetables that the earth has given us, mixing in the herbs and spices that give us pleasure. The divine oneness of life is within and all around us. Sometimes walking alone in nature we can feel its heartbeat and its wonder, and our steps become steps of remembrance.

Do we really feel the suffering of the earth, sense its need? Do we feel this connection with creation, how we are a part of this beautiful and suffering being? Then our prayers are alive, a living stream that flows from our heart. Then every step, every touch, will be a prayer for the earth, a remembrance of what is sacred. We are a part of the earth calling to its creator, crying in its time of need.’ (Praying for the Earth - Llewellyn Vaughan Lee)

It echoes the cry of Jesus on the cross - “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Let us spend a moment of quiet, recognising and acknowledging this cry. Jesus often drew the attention of his listeners to creation around him – the birds, the seeds, the fields, the sheep, the skies. Let us pray that we may hear the groans of the earth and be moved to respond.

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*

The cry of the mother ... of every woman



Jesus' mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then to the disciple, "Here is your mother." [John 19:25-27]

This moment of tenderness comes at the end of Jesus' journey to Calvary and marks the beginning of a small Christian community. A community called Church was born on Calvary at Golgotha, outside the walls of the city and women were there from that moment. Since then women have been carriers of life and borne hope in Christian families and faith communities throughout the world. In the Gospels we hear stories of women who followed Jesus, who surrounded Jesus, who listened to Him and tended to Him - Mary at the Anointing at Bethany, the Woman taken in adultery, the Widow of Naim, and the Samaritan woman come to mind.

In the Gospel of John, Mary the Mother of Jesus appears twice, once at the marriage in Cana at the heart of life celebrating a wedding and the second time at the foot of the cross at the moment of Jesus' death. Today women are present at the heart of life and death.

On the road to Calvary Jesus tells the women on the road "*weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children.*" He travels with them on their journeys and understands their pain. When Jesus speaks to women or about women in Scripture it is always with tenderness and compassion. He related to women with words of acceptance, dignity and respect. He speaks to each one as a person in their own right. He listens with respect to all the women, including those on the fringes of life, -poor people, widows, and those who are marginalised and He honours their experiences.

In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*) Pope Francis calls for a "revolution of tenderness." "And what is tenderness?" he asked. "It is the love that comes close and becomes real. It is a movement that starts from our heart and reaches the eyes, the ears and the hands."

Lord, this day we weep with you for all mothers who are struggling and all women who are in pain. We ask you to help us live in the world as signs of God's tender touch and by your example to love tenderly, act justly and walk humbly with you

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*

The cry of the homeless ...



*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests;
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head [Matthew 8:20].*

Abbud came from Egypt to Ireland nine years ago. His first accommodation was in the Direct Provision Centre in Baleskin in West Dublin; from there he was moved to Longford, and then to Cork, and from there to Waterford. While in Cork and Waterford he travelled twice a week to Dublin by bus to attend therapy sessions in Spirasi (A Spiritan project for asylum seekers and refugees who have experienced torture). Eventually, he was moved back to Dublin, to Hatch Hall, where he now lives. Even having been granted status to remain in Ireland in late 2016, he is still living in the Direct Provision system, because he cannot secure accommodation in either private or public housing. He longs for a place of his own that he can call home.

Homelessness is not confined to immigrants to our country. Daily we hear about the homelessness crisis in our society. Each month the numbers of those homeless increase. We hear, too, about children who find themselves going to school with an address in a hotel. Imagine the embarrassment of telling your teacher that you live in a hotel.... A story was told before Christmas about a little girl whose family had just got accommodation after a number of months in a hotel. When she was asked what she wanted for Christmas, she said she wanted nothing, as she had her own bedroom.

When the cold weather strikes, emergency accommodation is made available for those living on the streets and we are told that this is not a national emergency, that 'our rates of homelessness are about the same as other countries.'

We look at you, Jesus, and we see how children moved your heart:

*Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs [Mt. 18:14].*

May our hearts be moved by the stories of children crying out for a place that they can call home, and may we be challenged to protest at the 'normalisation' of homelessness.

May we grow in the awareness that Jesus had, that we are all one. *'This is my body broken for you.'*

May we recognise the broken body of Jesus in those who are longing for a place of their own.

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*



The cry of children ...

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it [Luke 18:15]

Our children are precious sacraments of the Divine. Witnesses to Mystery. The Irish writer Aidan Mathews asks that he might keep close to his heart 'the image of my children's feet when they were born. The soles of them were wizened with lines as if they had walked a great distance to come here.' Every child that is born into the world has something to teach us. Perhaps it is because they have come so fresh from God and are so full of wonder and curiosity and joy that they arrive as gifts to our jaded selves. But so often we do not allow ourselves to be touched by them.

Has the phrase 'the gift of a child' become a cliché? The UN Charter on the rights of the child adopted in 1959 speaks of 'the right to protection against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation'. These sentiments mock the reality in homes where fathers can physically and sexually abuse their children, their 'property'. It mocks the reality where children are abused in schools, institutions, sports and social clubs. It mocks the reality on the streets where homeless children sniff glue. It mocks the reality in places where children are torn apart, physically and emotionally as innocent victims of war. It mocks the reality where children die from hunger. It mocks the reality where children as young as four, five and six are forced to work, are sold into slavery. We speak of children as 'gift' or 'blessing' but in reality do we treat them as 'property', in the best scenario as valuable acquisitions and in the worst as ours to exploit?

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more. [Mt 2:18]*

Jesus, give us your eyes to look with compassion, to see all children with tenderness, respect and love as they reveal your Kingdom and Divine Presence in our everyday midst.

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*



The cry of the LGBT community...

Love is love. Love means: getting to know LGBT men and women, spending time with them, listening to them and being challenged by them. Listen to the voice of one gay man...

“As a gay man in my fifties I feel a sense of loss of the faith and community I had in our Church growing up. I grew up in a family where Church was very much part of our lives and I was actively involved in my parish community.

As I became aware of my sexual orientation, the only messages I was receiving from society, from the media, from my family and friends, from the Church was that it was wrong. It was something bad and I should be ashamed about it. It wasn't until I was twenty-five that I finally admitted to myself and later to others, who I really was. This process of 'coming-out' was shrouded with shame, disappointment and sadness. My ability to love and be in relationship was understood as being “objectively disordered.”

It is only in recent times that I feel I can stand in my own personhood, with pride, and hold the hand of the man I love in public. I am not lesser than anyone else. I feel the same emotions and attractions as anyone else, yet mine are classified as “intrinsically evil.”

Yet my faith in God has remained strong and I know I am loved by God. I am unable to align myself with a Church that baptised and welcomed me but will not accept me in the fullness of who I am. This is a very real loss in my life. I am without a community of faith.”

It can prove difficult for members of the LGBT community to accept their sexuality as a gift, given the current cultural biases against their orientation. Violence is common. The message of the Gospel, however, is love. Every human being is entitled to the promise of Jesus, *“I came that you may have life and have it to the full.”* Yet members of the LGBT community continue to be targeted, slandered, attacked, arrested and even put to death in places around the world. Here, therefore, are men and women who understand suffering, stigma and frustration, the very types of experiences that can lead one closer to companionship with the Christ who suffers. The LGBT community is often despised and rejected by others, a people of suffering ...ones from whom others hide their faces (Isa. 53:3).

It is important now, more than ever, that we remember that the church teaches that a homosexual person must be accepted with “respect, compassion and sensitivity” and “every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfil God's will in their lives” (Catechism, No. 2358).

Jesus knew what it felt like to be ridiculed, rejected, spat at, slapped, stripped and even put to death. We pray to this suffering Jesus that we grow in respect, compassion and sensitivity to our LGBT brothers and sisters. We pray that we may reach out to people like Jesus did, that we may go out to people where they are and speak their language like Jesus did. We pray that we may constantly go out to the ‘peripheries where even the Church has not been serving people or where people need it the most.’ (James Martin SJ)

***We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.***

The cry of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants ...



As long as you did it to the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me [Matthew 25:40]

Six years ago there's a knock on the door of Hashem al-Souki, a civil servant from Syria. He is just 37 working for the regional water board. The regime is going from door to door rounding up all the men they find. A wave of anti-authoritarian protests erupted across the Arab world in late 2010 and early 2011, reaching Syria in February 2011. Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria, did not tolerate protests.

Hashem's children watch him as he goes to open the door. Outside stand twenty men. Whether they are from the army, the police or a pro-regime militia, he does not know. But they are here for him, and half the people on the street. And now, as Hashem is shoved into the back of a van, his children watching from the front room, the regime is getting its revenge. [The New Odyssey by Patrick Kingsley].

We are aware that many migrants working here are exploited. Migrants working in the restaurant sector, security, home care and domestic work were surveyed by the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland:

- ❖ 44% received less than €8.65 per hour
- ❖ 26% do not receive payslips
- ❖ 82% were not compensated for working on Sundays

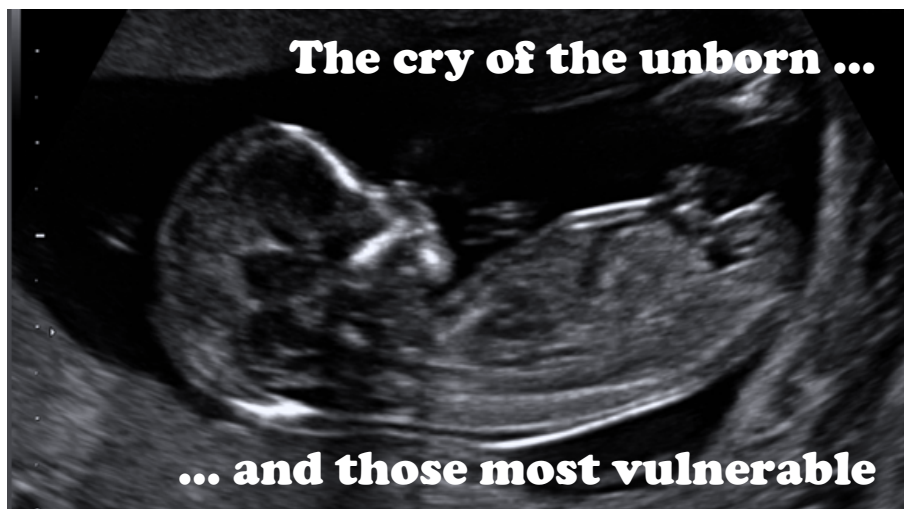
As we gather on this Good Friday we look at you, Jesus, and see you marginalised, rejected, crucified and killed because you stood shoulder to shoulder with the little ones, the unregarded ones. You upset the religious system; you upset the political system and the economic system of your time. You had to die. *It is better for one man to die for the people.* [Jn.18:14]

As we acknowledge our failure to follow your example, Jesus, we pray that our hearts might be opened to those of a different colour, creed, race, to make them welcome among us, to recognise the gift that they bring to us.

We recognise our lack of courage in challenging the unjust systems in our society that make sure that the wealthy grow wealthier and the poor become poorer. We pray for a greater openness and courage to challenge these unjust systems in our society.

We pray that we might take seriously the words of Jesus: *As long as you did it to the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me* [Mt. 25:40].

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*



But how can this be? asked Mary the unwed mother to be. (Lk 1:34]

Months later, carrying the infant Jesus into the temple, she was told, "A sword shall pierce your own soul" [Lk 2:35]

Jesus praying in Gethsemane cried, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; Abba, Father, remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." [Mt 26:39]

Both Jesus and Mary knew fear and felt the terror of uncertainty. Yet they both heard the echoes of what was said to Joshua in the Old Testament when asked to lead his people to the promised land, *"Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* [Joshua 1:9]

In 2016 there were 190,406 abortions in the UK of which 3992 were for women from the island of Ireland. 56 million induced abortions occurred worldwide in the same year. In 2016 there were 769 deaths by suicide on the island of Ireland. The WHO estimates that there are approximately 1 million deaths by suicide worldwide each year.

The country is caught in the grip of a noisy debate on the 8th amendment. Amid the cacophony of shouted slogans and pious platitudes there is the reality of the lived experience. The media bombard us with statistics, the definitive shoulds and shouldnts, the perceived rights and wrongs. Social media and placards on lamp posts battle to inform and misinform us.

Crucify! Crucify! We hear some shout. This is my body! We hear in the stillness of our heart. Some stand silently and watch from a distance. Others walk by too preoccupied to notice, too busy to get involved, too disconnected to care. A pregnant woman carries her pain of knowing the child she bears has life limiting conditions. A parent sheds a tear of sadness and outrage to hear her child living with Down Syndrome tossed about as a mere statistic.

In the darkness of the womb a little heart continues to beat. In the darkness of a troubled mind battling thoughts of depression and suicide the heart beats. In the darkness of a body crippled by drug and alcohol abuse the heart beats.

Who do people say I am? And you, who do you say I am? [Mk 8:27, 29]

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive God to be,

and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

[Desiderata - Max Ehrmann]

We pray today for the many who are battling with their conscience about life issues. We pray for grieving families who have lost a child. We pray for couples who have to agonise about decisions to be made or are now living with the pain of decisions made. We pray for families affected by the agony and disbelief of death by suicide. We pray that we may not be silent bystanders in questions about life concerning the unborn, the young, the dependent, the troubled or the elderly. May we, like Simeon and Veronica, be people who reach out in care and compassion to the many who bear their cross silently amidst the loud cries of 'Crucify, crucify.'

*We look to you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your cross you have shown us the way.*

S I L E N C E

So where is God in all of this? The descent of Jesus to the underworld assures us of God's presence in the most desolate places of the human heart. Experiences of hopelessness, of abandonment – the psychic hell of depression, of grief, of loss or rejection, are all infused with the assurance of Christ's solidarity. He too shared fully in these human experiences and there is a palpable need for ritual and creativity around this experience in our communities.

This is not something most of us are comfortable with! It is about solidarity with the real, lived-experiences of hopelessness, of despair and of Godlessness that many experience. These are not experiences we can sweep under the carpet or 'band-aid' with optimism. For some this is a lived reality and can last all their lives. Try consoling parents who have lost a child or a person living with depression or someone who has experienced concerted irrational abuse because of their sexual orientation or a refugee who faces deportation having fled countries of war and violence or a troubled mind living with the pain of abuse – the absence of God and the darkness of the tomb behind the rolled stone is very real for them.

(From: Wait In The Bright Darkness - Aiveen Mullally)

It's possible I am pushing through solid rock
in flintlike layers, as the ore lies, alone;
I am such a long way in I see no way through,
and no space: everything is close to my face,
and everything close to my face is stone.

I don't have much knowledge yet in grief
so this massive darkness makes me small.
You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:
then your great transforming will happen to me,
and my great grief cry will happen to you.

(Pushing Through - Rainer Maria Rilke)



They took the body of Jesus
and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices,
according to the Jewish burial custom.

Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden,
and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried.

So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day;
for the tomb was close by.

(John 19: 40-42)

