

April 7, 2023



BY HIS STRIPES WE WERE HEALED

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed.

ISAIAH 53:3-5

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help. In the days when Christ was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was

made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

HEBREWS 4:16, 5:7-9

Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing there keeping warm. And they said to him, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crowed....

JOHN 18:17, 25-26

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home....

JOHN 19:25-27

Reflection

Each year as we experience Good Friday, Christian communities are met with an overwhelming narrative of corrupt leadership, unconscionable violence, and murder. It may seem that we are being asked to surrender to an overwhelming agony of loss. We indeed bear an immense burden of grief as we witness the sufferings of Jesus. However, if we look more closely, we see that we are also being invited to weep with gratitude for the incalculable love that endures all to save our souls.

In Isaiah, we read of the Suffering Servant, the chosen of God, who is held in contempt, but whose victory lies in the saving hope he ultimately brings to a people broken by the ravages of subjugation and exile: **He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured....he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed.** Here is a love that cannot be destroyed by the infidelities of human opinion or status, but rather flourishes in its endless yearning for others' good. This is the love of Jesus.

Hebrews marvels at the unfailing generosity of Jesus, who never lags in his zeal for God's *anawim*—the 'poor ones,' ignored by the powerful, but cherished in the love of God for the world to come-- Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Jesus is not validated by his status as Messiah, but is 'perfected' by the grace of suffering that pours out of a heart mirroring the living love of his Father.

In John's Gospel, as Peter stands outside the courtyard of the high priest, the gatekeeper queries him about his connection to Jesus, and he immediately denies it. Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Simon Peter was standing there keeping warm. And they said to him, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crowed. When he recognizes the cruel betrayal of his denial, he "went out and wept bitterly" (Mt 26:75). We may not be guilty of a death-dealing rejection of someone who has loved us, but when we turn away from such love, we know to some degree the emptiness of soul that left Peter in anguished tears. Like Peter, we can return again to reclaim our own bond of love, and being embraced once more, we recognize some measure of the infinite love that forgives before we ask.

In the last heartbreaking moments of his life, Jesus gazes upon his mother, Mary, and the beloved disciple, standing before him in the final agonies of their loss and bottomless grief. With just a gaze, and a poignant gesture of surrender, he turns to them and says: "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. He releases them back to the God who had blessed his life with their graced and unwavering love and care. By naming them family in a new way of life, he bequeaths to us the blessed reality of family, church, and community reborn in God's *agape*—a love of inclusion, kindness, compassion, and hearts of endless self-giving.

This brief odyssey of love amidst a path of horrific violence and immoral destruction reminds us once more that there is no evil, no betrayal, no violation of love or trust that can destroy who God is for us or what God creates for us and within us. The Passion may mirror the worst of our weaknesses, but it also incarnates the richest mysteries of our own fulfillment and ultimate salvation. We learn to live for God as God lives in us. In such blessing we can only weep with hope and gratitude.

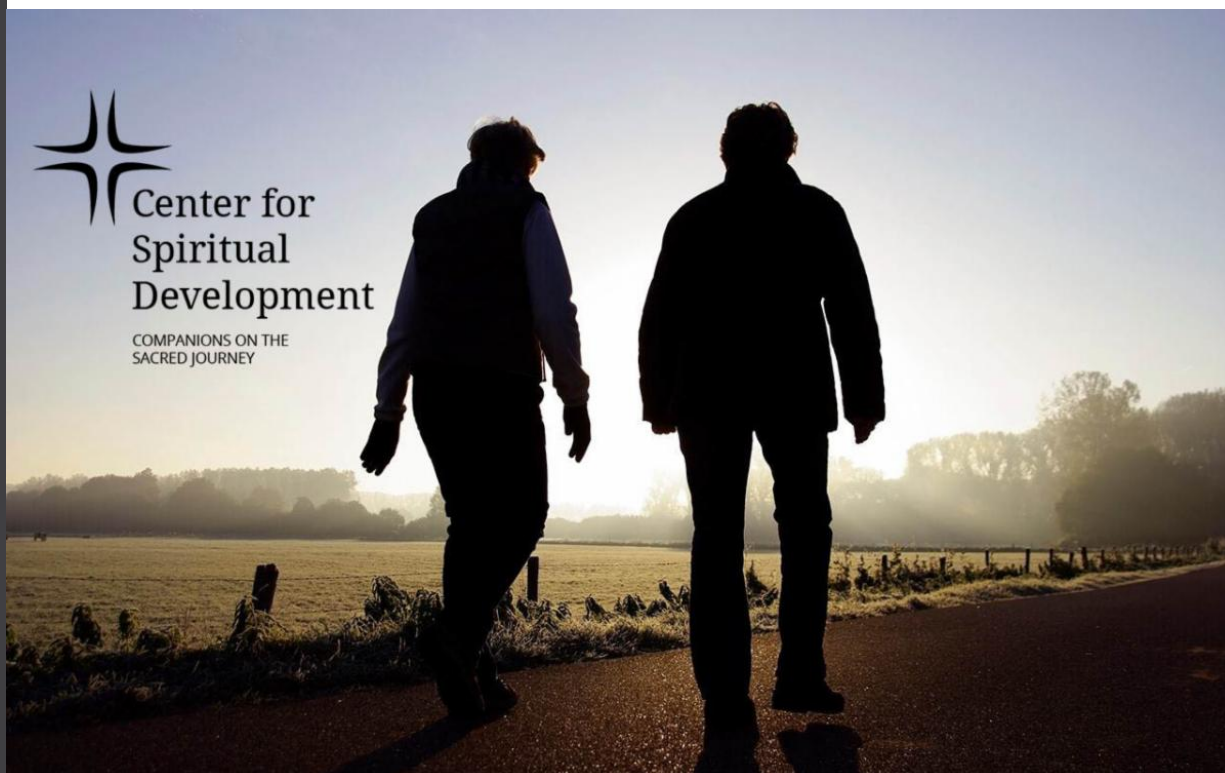


For Pondering

- In a dark moment of your life, did a particular experience of love or kindness help you to realize that God's blessings are always present?
- How have your own discoveries of love and forgiveness helped you to turn to others with merciful eyes and a compassionate heart?
- If you could have a face-to-face conversation with Jesus, what would you ask him to nurture in your soul as you walk in a world of fragile loyalties and anxious relationships?

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