

May 18, 2025

Daily Reflections

Journeying through Easter



Center for Spiritual Development

STEEP INCLINES

By Alicia Rodriguez

An Excerpt from Today's First Reading

"It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

ACTS 14:22

Reflection

As I reflect on today's first reading, I am reminded of a recent experience. At the beginning of Lent, I had accepted an invitation from a friend to hike the Stations of the Cross at Santiago Retreat Center with a group from our church on Good Friday. It is the only day of the year that the retreat center opens up to the general public.

Throughout Lent I had told myself that I needed to start training for the steep

slippery slopes on the trail. You see, it would not be my first time going on this hike ... it would be my third time, and yet I had never made it past the tenth Station. I had made up my mind that this year was going to be different, and I went to the gym as much as I could during Lent to prepare myself for the hike that awaited me on Good Friday. Along the way I had friends who understood my goal and joined me at the gym or for walks in the park while I tried my best to get into shape. There were also, however, those who didn't believe I'd stick to it or that my hard work would pay off.

The night before, I knew that I was going to have to carry a gallon of water in my backpack as well as my lunch, some snacks, and -- because I am the type to be overprepared -- a first aid kit and a change of clothes. When I tested the weight, I realized it was much heavier than I anticipated and started to worry that perhaps those people who doubted in me were right. Even more worrying, it started raining that night. When I awoke on Good Friday, I contemplated canceling. I looked out the window and saw that the sky was gray, and I knew that if I went on the hike, I was going to have to add the weight of a raincoat in case it started raining. I didn't know what to do. I had spent over a month working muscles that hadn't been worked since I played softball in high school. I had started fasting because I knew that I wasn't going to be able to eat much before the hike if I didn't want to feel sick halfway through. I had sacrificed a lot of my free time to go to the gym to prepare for this day -- and now I sat there contemplating skipping the whole thing because I knew it was going to be harder with the trails recently rained on and the added weight in my backpack.

Ultimately, I decided to get in the car and make my way to the retreat center. When the rest of the group arrived, I saw that we had a wide mix of people joining us -- from little kids to high-schoolers to middle-aged adults. As we began the hike, it started to mist. Very quickly my backpack lightened as I let people borrow my extra jacket and hats that I had brought along. Then came the first steep incline. I was able to make it to the top on my own, but had to take a break after.

The second incline was steeper than the first, and I didn't think I could make it. A part of me wished that I had brought my dog so that he could drag me along. Instead, a friend linked her arm with mine and pulled me up the incline with her. When we got to the top she went to help some of the others in our group. As I stood still waiting for them, I felt my muscles start to tense up. I realized then that the only way I could prevent a cramp was to keep moving forward and push through the soreness and exhaustion that I was feeling.

The third incline came after the tenth Station. The first two inclines, I knew what I was up against ... but the third was an unknown. It was the steepest

incline with the most loose dirt, which made it twice the challenge of the others. It was narrow and we had to go single file, pausing every so often to let people pass us on their way back down. Those pauses felt like an eternity for me as my muscles tightened. However, despite the amount of pain I was in, I kept going. I practiced the breathing techniques my friends at the gym had taught me and I was able to recollect myself and push forward. When I got to the top I saw the vast amount of beauty around me. All of God's creation surrounded me, and a gentle breeze caressed my face. I was overwhelmed with awe at the blessing God had given me.

Life and death to me are much like that experience. We go through hardships in this life that help prepare us to enter the Kingdom of God. Along the way there are people that may laugh at us for what we believe in, or how we live our lives, but there are also those who are on a journey similar to ours -- and together we help one another lighten the burden of the hardships that we face.

I wonder now, if that view left me so awestruck ... how much more awestruck will I feel when I enter God's kingdom?



Top of the Stations of the Cross - Santiago Retreat Center
Photo by Alicia Rodriguez

For Pondering

Ask yourself:

- What are some of the hardships in my life right now? How will they help me get closer to the kingdom of God?
 - Who are the people helping me carry the burden of these hardships? How can I help others carry the burden of their hardships?
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For Prayer

*Heavenly Father,
I trust you to guide my steps through this life's journey.
Help me to see opportunities for growth and to trust in your perfect timing.
Grant me the wisdom to navigate challenges
and the grace to embrace every experience.
Amen.*

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