

“Father, forgive them ...for they know not what they do. My God, my God ...why have you forsaken me?”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a university president in Holland, by the name of Fr. Thomas Brandsma, was arrested by the Nazis during WWII. He was taken to the concentration camp at Dachau.

There, he was isolated from the other prisoners –in a dog kennel. The guards amused themselves by ordering him to bark like a dog when they passed-by. Eventually, Father died from torture.

What the Nazis didn't know was that the priest kept a diary of his ordeal, writing between the lines of print in an old prayerbook.

He wrote that he was able to endure his suffering because he knew Jesus had suffered before him. In a poem addressed to Jesus, he wrote:

“No grief shall fall my way, but I shall see your grief-filled eyes; the lonely way you once walked, has made me sorrow-wise. Your love has turned to brightest light, this night-like way of mine... . Stay with me, Jesus, only stay; I shall not fear--if reaching out my hand, I feel ...you ...are near.”

The suffering of Jesus, which we recall in a special way today, has been a source of strength to countless people throughout history.

These people, like Fr. Brandsma, could have never endured their suffering without the knowledge that Jesus had suffered before them in their hour of trial.

Now, if we step back and look at the suffering of Jesus, we see how he suffered in 3 distinct ways. He suffered **mentally**, **physically**, and **spiritually**.

1st, he suffered **mentally**.

Jesus experienced this kind of suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. He sweat blood, just thinking about the ordeal that lay before him. Jesus suffered great mental anguish when his followers betrayed, denied, and deserted him.

All of us can relate to **mental** suffering. We've all experienced it. For example, a 15-year-old runaway was describing mental suffering ...when he said in an interview in Parade magazine:

“I never had a real family. I never met my real father. I'm always lonely... . I feel like there must be something wrong with me... . I must be bad. I feel like I don't exist ...because nobody ever loved me.”

In time of mental suffering, often the only comfort we have is the knowledge that Jesus suffered the same way before us and is now supporting us in our hour of trial.

2nd, Jesus suffered **physically**.

He was brutally beaten, crowned with thorns, and, ultimately, nailed to a cross.

Again, we can all relate to **physical** pain. We've all experienced it, some more than others. It was this kind of pain that Dr. Sheila Cassidy endured in Chile, in the early 70's. She was a medical doctor & made the fatal mistake to treat a wounded, government protester. The police arrested her, tortured her, trying to force her to name people in the resistance movement. Stretched out by ropes, like Jesus on the cross, she endured physical pain for 4 days. Of the ordeal, she wrote:

“I was experiencing, in some slight way, what Jesus suffered. All during the ordeal, I just felt that he was there, and I asked him to help me hang on.”

Often, in time of great, physical suffering, the only comfort we have is knowing that Jesus suffered the same way, even more so, and is now supporting us in our time of trial.

3rd, Jesus suffered spiritually.

For example, as he hung helplessly on the cross, it seemed that even his Father had deserted him. He prayed,

“My God, my God ...why ...have you forsaken me?”

Again, we can all relate to spiritual suffering. We've felt forsaken. We've felt lonely, isolated, even discarded. There have been times when we have felt so alone that it's as though God himself has abandoned us!

My point is ...that Jesus suffered in all 3 ways that a human being can possibly suffer.

He suffered **mentally**, enduring the pain of betrayal.

He suffered **physically**, enduring the pain of torture.

He suffered **spiritually**, enduring the pain of abandonment.

There's a message in here for all of us. **“What, exactly, is that message?”** you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

When we feel ourselves suffering in one of these ways, we should turn to Jesus, to Christ-crucified. He knows exactly how we feel. He's: 'Been there; done that!' He will not fail to strengthen us.

And this brings me back to our opening story of Fr. Brandsma. When we find ourselves suffering in one of these ways, we can do no better than to repeat Fr's prayer-poem to Jesus:

“No grief shall fall my way, but I shall see your grief-filled eyes; the lonely way that you once walked, has made me sorrow-wise. Your love has turned to brightest light, this night-like way of mine... . Stay with me, Jesus, only stay; I shall not fear -if, reaching out my hand, I feel...you ...are near.”

In our pain, we can identify with Christ-crucified and, not only gain strength –but we can embrace our terrible cross and thank Jesus for the chance to prove our love for him –in our mutual suffering! We cannot only tolerate a particular cross in life, **BUT** we can, with Christ-crucified, thank the Father for the opportunity to walk with and identify with Christ, his son.

We all have our own Golgotha at one time or another –hopefully only **one**. Regardless, it can make us **‘bitter’** or it can make us **‘better;’** that is, make us **‘Satan-like’** or make us **‘saint-like.’**

Just remember:

None of us are puppets on a string. In his inscrutable love, he has given us **all...** a free will.

At those most difficult of all times, we can reach out to God and say, **“YES!”**

or

...we can stomp our foot and say, **“NO!”**

For each of us, all eternity hangs in the balance.
Because he died on that hill, each of us can freely choose.
And, for the love of God, we had best choose... **“YES!”**

May that eternal God, our Abba, in his inscrutable love, bless you,
as we enter the holiest of all weeks:

...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.