

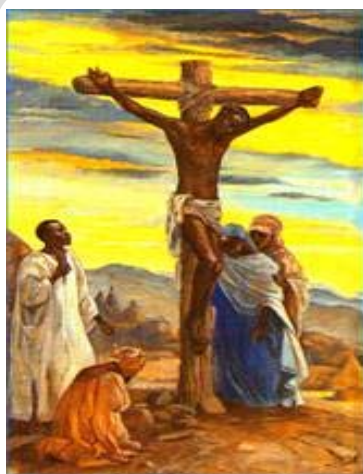
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Faith Formation

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At some point in our journey of faith, we are met by what can be an insurmountable question, a challenge that can shake the very foundation of our faith, or at the very least give rise to a tormenting doubt. In every century, in every life a question surfaces, “why is there so much evil in the world.” Or some may ask “how are we expected to trust in a God who is supposed to be a God of mercy when suffering, injustice, sickness and death are all around us and it appears to have the last word?” Have we not all groaned from deep with in...”why Lord, why!” Has God abandoned us? Some in our times sing with Bette Midler...”God is watching from a distance...” Is that true?

In liturgical time this

Passion

Lisa M. Gulino

year we experienced the shortest Ordinary Time that is possible...and it seems that we went from Christmas, to the Lenten season, and now to the Passion, death and Resurrection. Not even three months ago the Church prayed: “Almighty God and Father of light, a child is born for us and a son is given to us. Your eternal Word **leaped down from heaven** in the silent watches of the night and now your Church is filled with wonder at the nearness of her God.” (Christmas Dawn Mass).

In a few short days we will pray in the Easter Proclamation: “Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave **you gave away your Son.** ... O night truly blessed when **heaven is wedded to earth** and man is reconciled with God! Rejoice,

O earth, in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! **Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!”**

To experience, as we have, the two greatest solemnities of our faith so close together drives home for us that God has entered into time and space in his Son Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Jesus is proof of God-with-us (Emmanuel), and seeing the Crucified Christ reminds us that God “places himself on the side of man.” (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, pg. 63) In the letter to the Philippians this reality becomes abundantly clear: “He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, become obedient to

Christ yesterday
And today
The beginning
And the end
ALPHA

And
OMEGA

All time belongs to him
And all the ages
To him be glory
And power
Through every
Age for ever.
AMEN.

(Preparation of Candle)

By his holy
And
Glorious wounds
May Christ our Lord
Guard us
And
Keep us.
AMEN

(Preparation of Candle)

death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:7-8)

This mystery of Jesus, who is God and man, laying down his life for us “while we were still yet sinners” is known as **the Scandal of the Cross**. John Paul II explained it this way: “Love, desires to justify Himself to mankind. He is not the Absolute that remains outside of the world, indifferent to human suffering. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, a **God who shares man’s lot and participates in his destiny.**” (Crossing the Threshold of Hope, pg. 62) It is in the Scandal of the Cross that we have the key to interpreting the great mystery of suffering, which is so much a part of human history. John Paul writes, “the crucified Christ is **proof of God’s solidarity with man in his suffering.**” (Crossing the Threshold of Hope, pg. 63)

While Jesus hung on the Cross, his enemies cried out: “If you are God’s Son, come down from that Cross that we may see and believe.” (Mk 15:32) He stayed, nailed to the Cross, in agony... in complete solidarity with every person throughout the ages who has known the way of suffering and pain, loss and torment and the feeling of abandonment. Jesus chose the side of humanity... to reveal “the nearness of God” in suffering, to “conquer”, so that “Glory” may fill us, and “darkness vanishes for ever!” God does not watch from a distance!

With the Church we sing, “It is truly right that with full hearts and minds and voices we should praise the unseen God, the all-powerful Father, and his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. For Christ has ransomed us with his blood, and paid for us the price of Adam’s sin to our eternal Father.” (Easter Proclamation)

Jesus Christ has “**loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.**” (John 13:1) To the end, with his last breath, with the water and blood flowing from His side (Jn 19:34). Pope John Paul explains that “to the end” also means that Christ “accepted all the consequences of man’s sin, taking them upon Himself.” (Crossing the Threshold of Hope, pg. 66) Long before Christ came, the prophet Isaiah affirmed: “It was our infirmities that he bore, ... we had all gone astray like sheep, each following

his own way; **But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.**” (Is 53:4-6)

The Passion of Jesus Christ, the accounts of his death and resurrection, unveil, if you will, the face of God. All of Scripture is the telling of the drama of God’s **passion** for the human race. St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians says of himself that he came “proclaiming the mystery of God...” and that he was “resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Cor. 2:2). In Jesus Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3) and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). The Cross reveals for us the “breadth and length and height and depth” of God’s love which “surpasses all understanding” and overwhelms us “with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:18ff)



St. John in his first letter writes with great assuredness and conviction, “We know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1John 4:16-20).

During his earthly life, Jesus of Nazareth preached the saving Mysteries, the nearness of the Father and the reality of the Father’s love through Word and deeds. The face of God is revealed in Christ as he ministers to the needs of the people, voluntarily washes the feet of the disciples and lays down his life for all. Christ has chosen the side of humanity by sharing the way of suffering and death. **Let us chose the side of God by remembering our dignity as sharer’s in God’s own nature.** St. Leo the Great exhorts us, “remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1691) With a sense of joyful urgency, **we go in haste to live as disciples of Christ and to serve our neighbor.** We remember the two-fold commandment of charity as set forth in the Decalogue (10 Words)...love of God and love of neighbor.