

It is on the mysterious level of spirit that our being in communion with Christ's communion unto death matters, or has any significance in amplifying grace (God's graced presence), in the mode of offer, in the deep consciousness of both victims and their victimizers.

I am not suggesting that we neglect what we can actively do to alleviate suffering, to resist injustice and intolerance, to be passionate for peace and to challenge the social, economic and political systems that crucify people in our own country and around the world. Energy to influence the social network and to take crucified people down from the cross is the fruit of communion. But what we are able to do, the effect we can have, seems so very little. Crosses keep being erected in history. Children still starve, dictators still murder with impunity. Countries continue to drop more destructive bombs. Our earth home continues to degrade.

We hope into the darkness, we pray into the otherness of people's freedom, for what the Crucified Christ's offered grace of intimate, transforming communion can bring about in human freedom. We hope into the darkness of Good Friday, yes, but we hope, through that darkness, into the fullness of Jesus' final words: *It is finished. It is accomplished.* (Sr. Constance FitzGerald, OCD, Good Friday 2017)



Join us for the Eucharistic Celebration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on Sunday, July 16 at 9 a.m.

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BALTIMORE CARMEL News



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Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother...
(John 19:25)

The gospel for the upcoming Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel shows us Mary standing near the foot of the cross of Jesus during his crucifixion. It is an excerpt from John's Passion narrative which is read in its entirety on Good Friday. While we have moved on liturgically to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, we remain painfully aware of the many people who are being crucified day after day in every corner of our suffering earth. This impels us to offer our Good Friday reflection to you in this newsletter so that we might pray together in deep hope for the transformative love our world needs.

Prayer / Transformation / Love

As we solemnly remember the Passion and death of Jesus this year, I am overwhelmed with the suffering and dying of Christ on this earth, at this time. The extent of it is mind numbing and soul rattling. And the words St. Paul heard on the road to Damascus keep sounding in my heart: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you, Lord? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*

I am the migrant, refugee women and children on your borders, in your camps. I am the people of Southern Sudan and Nigeria whose lives are being snuffed out by famine. I am the mother holding my lifeless, dead baby in my arms, one of the 20 million people in Somalia and Yemen who will, without massive aid, die of starvation in the next 3 months. I am the people caught in the endless, demonic, devastating war in Syria, the women, men and children targeted and writhing in pain from the effects of chemicals dropped from the sky. I am the women, the girls, the children kidnapped, raped and trafficked in every part of the world. I am the illegal immigrant mother ruthlessly deported and I am the child, the teenager, left behind in your country. I am the children caught in the crossfire of poverty and violence in your own city. I am the poor family, the elderly couple, the homeless man, who can't scrape together the means to secure the food and health care we need for life. I am the evolving earth, your fragile, threatened home, that cradles all this suffering and death. I am Jesus whom you are crucifying. Jesus to whom today the Church attributes in the first reading the poignant description of Isaiah's Suffering Servant: *He was despised and rejected, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity...we held him of no account...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter...*

I paint this picture not to engender guilt but to express the terrible pathos of the escalating impasse of crucifixion in which we find ourselves on this Good Friday 2017. When I hear the Passion according



to John and stand before the cross of Jesus, when I pray, I feel with an intensity I can hardly endure all these people clinging to my soul the way we see war-torn, orphaned, or beggar children clutching at a journalist or missionary or aid worker or American doctor on the dusty streets of a poor overcrowded barrio, a distant village, a bombed-out town, a famine ravaged countryside. They cannot be shaken off!

Other years, it seems to me, we might have been drawn in prayer into a deep intimacy with the suffering, dying Jesus, and in the power of that transformative intimacy, into a profound solidarity with those who suffer. That is real. It happens. Communion with God in contemplative prayer necessarily effects this kind of compassionate, intimate connection and presence. But this year is different. Somehow it is the other way around. It is through the shocking enormity of crucified lives – like a dark overlay – that we contemplate the unfathomable mystery of Jesus dying on the cross. It seems as if our powerlessness in the face of so much agony and loss, such rampant cruelty and hard-heartedness, breaks down the protective boundaries of our souls allowing the full impact of senseless, untimely, unfair death to crash in upon us.

Engulfed, surrounded, struck dumb, we reach with a kind of desperation for the Cross of Christ on behalf of all the victims of human sinfulness who suffer and die counting for so little. With them, actually as them, we cling to Jesus as *he lets his strength trickle out in weakness, his courage drown in fear, his love sink into the darkness of Godforsakenness*, his life succumb to death. (Rahner) This is where the contemplative person, the person who prays, must stay imbedded - vulnerable to the full brunt of human sinfulness, affirming the presence of God in the midst of the shocking enormity of pain and death, knowing the passion and death of Christ does give warrant for locating the compassion of God right in the center of human affliction, as Elizabeth Johnson suggests.

But why do we affirm the presence of God in the midst of pain and death, assert that the passion and death of Christ give warrant for locating the compassion of God in the center of human affliction?



Because in Jesus, God experienced evil from the inside. *Having tasted the dregs of betrayal, rejection and personal agony, the crucified Christ knows what it is to suffer - and to suffer as a victim of human malice.* In his own body, he knows. This is breathtaking. Only Christianity has this: the living God, in Jesus, entering *the fray, personally drinking the cup of suffering and going down into the nothingness of death to transform it from within.* (Johnson) By inhabiting the inside of evil with unrelenting love to the very end, Jesus, the self-donation of God, brings divine life into closest solidarity with all those who suffer the same annihilating darkness. Not what we expect divinity to be! It is shocking enough that Jesus, the Incarnate Word, becomes one of history's millions of victims. That he becomes one **with** and **for** them can only be explained by the unfathomable depths of God's unconditional love. (Jerome Miller) The crucifixion situates communion in the darkest place, at the nadir of human hopelessness, and tells of unspeakable affection and solidarity flowing from the cross of Jesus to all the other cross-bearers of our world, to all the victims of human sinning.

It is from this place of almost incomprehensible communion that Jesus utters his final words in St. John's Gospel: *It is finished. It is accomplished.* In Johannine theology this is a victory cry. Faithful to his identity, his being from and to his Father (Abba), Jesus loves to the very end. He thereby completes his mission, fulfils his Father's will. Jesus' ultimate flourishing - glorification - is in this all-embracing communion.

What does this say to our communal grief? Wary of eloquence, we can only stammer. But somehow the transformation of **our** consciousness - **our** communal redemption - is radically connected to the agony of all those clinging to our souls and haunting our prayer.

We must stay with Good Friday, powerless in prayer at the cross, absorbing from Jesus the intimate compassion that will alter our relational identity and transform our souls. Christ longs for us to join him, to be one with him, in communicating across the vast currents of human consciousness the compassion, the love, the utterly faithful, total communion, that serves as a thickening of the grace that surrounds the victims of human sin and strengthens them in their inner depths.