

Passion Sunday

Suffering is a problem. In religious terms, its an evil, demonic even, threatening to undermine not only our peace, but our self-confidence, our very self-worth. The current daily reports on the coronavirus can become overwhelming. Even if we are not ourselves infected, yet, more and more of us know people who have or soon will be. Our lives have been turned upside down—either having to work and study from home, or as ten million Americans this past week alone, laid off from work altogether, while on the other hand those in the medical field are working themselves to the point of exhaustion, too many, to the point where they themselves are falling sick, some even dying.

Some think suffering, particularly suffering on such a massive and global scale, is a problem for our religious belief that there is a God above, all good, all powerful, all loving. In times like these God can seem like wishful thinking. But I would offer that we cannot afford to ask that question right now. The more pressing question for us today is not whether such a God exists but *where* does such a God exist? Where can God be found in such overwhelming, random illness and death. How can we reconnect to what we hold most sacred, what gives our life its meaning and value, its purpose and point, when our lives are so turned upside down; where the most selfless, compassionate and heroic of doctors and nurses in our hospitals, EMT's and police on our streets, CNA's caring for our elderly are put in the greatest danger of contracting the virus themselves, with masks and gowns, gloves and face shields in such short supply. Where triage protocols of who lives and who dies may soon be in force as hospitals themselves become overwhelmed with the sick and the dying.

When this is all over, then we can step back and speculate over whether there is a God. But right now in the teeth of such suffering, the live question the more pressing question is *where* to find grace in such evil, where find blessing amidst such a curse, how *be* religious, literally, how to *re-ligio*, re-connect, to what we hold sacred in such demonic circumstances? Well in the words of John-Paul II, "Look to Christ." Particularly today, look to Christ. For where is Christ today, on Passion Sunday? Hanging, on a cross. Suffering and dying himself, that he might redeem us all from suffering and death. Not eliminate suffering *or* death, not even cure suffering or banish death, but redeem such evil, bringing God's presence, his loving care and compassionate mercy to us as he literally suffers with, is present before us, cum passio, hanging

and dying on *his* cross. Today is a day for us to be with Christ that we might feel Christ with us as we endure our own cross.

I find it hard to look away from the news, the youtube clips, the newspaper accounts, of the mounting tragedy and the pundits and op-eds trying to make sense of it all. Its like driving by the most horrific car crash, or being pinned under one of those cars oneself. But we also need to look to Christ by looking *for* Christ in the midst of such horror, look for Christ in the selfless generosity and bravery of those who are running towards the sick and dying even as we must stay away. It might seem that overwhelmed by such tragedy there is nothing for us to do. Cruelly, for most of us, the best we can do for those suffering and dying *is* to stay away, stay away physically. But we can be present virtually, connecting with those quarantined, Skyping, Zooming, Facetiming one another, posting words and images and videos of encouragement, compassion and wisdom to family and friends, even facebook friends, twitter followers we have never met in person, but who find a reason to see and read what we post. And in so doing we can be there spiritually. And while we may not be able to be with them, we can still volunteer to help out when and where we can contribute, rather than add to the compounding suffering.

Today we retell the story of Christ's crucifixion, how he willing chose to suffer that we might know that God knows what it is like to suffer too, suffer to the point when Christ himself wondered where God was to be found: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" How many thousands of Americans, how many hundreds of thousands of people around the globe have or soon will echo Christ's lament? But as it is Christ's lament, we know where Christ can be found—Christ can be found right here, right now.