Fifth Sunday of Lent

by Ed Hays

"Now my soul is troubled," Jesus laments in the gospel of this Sunday before Palm Sunday (**John 12:20-33**). "And what should I say: Father, save me from this hour?"

 His head must have ached from the pounding of conflicting thoughts --
on the one hand, embracing whatever God and his destiny required and, on the other hand, his natural self-preservation that urged him to save himself. As a patient in this agony, Jesus may have felt like the woman whose doctor asked her, "Where does it hurt?" Looking up at him with a grimace, she answered, "Oh doctor, where doesn?t it hurt?" Plato taught that physical pain is also experienced by the soul. Those who experience intense pain know that their souls ache as much as their bodies do.

In Gethsemane, anticipating his tortuous death on the cross, Jesus endured an all-encompassing suffering: his sweat became like drops of blood as he cried out, "I am deeply grieved, even unto death" (Mark 14:34). Once pain has reached a certain threshold, it expands beyond the site of its origin, causing an avalanche of biochemical reactions that affect the circulation, muscles, tissues, and organs of the body -- as anyone who suffers the excruciating pain of a migraine headache can affirm.

Suffering from headaches seems to be a problem that has existed since the dawn of humanity. Eight thousand years ago, Sumerian pharmacists offered relief from headaches with the medicine of pulverized bark from the willow tree. In medieval times, medicinal blood-sucking leeches were applied to the forehead. In the mid-sixteenth century, if a court official of Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible complained of a headache, the tsar would order nail to be driven into his head. Although this cure sounds more like a diabolical punishment, nails have been used since primitive times to release the demons believed to reside inside aching heads. Heave a sigh of gratitude that today we are spared such primitive medical treatments.

For his soul-body suffering, Jesus seeks relief not from nails, leeches, or crushed willow bark, but in the conviction that if he endured suffering like the dying grain of wheat, he would produce that kind of fruit that glorifies God.

The Sufi mystic Rumi says of suffering: "Your defects are the ways that glory is manifested. Don?t turn your head. Keep looking at the bandaged place. That is where the light enters you." Find relief from your pain in this wisdom that your wounds of heart and body are portholes through which the splendorous Light enters you. Keep in mind that your wounds and defects may very well be the manifestations of the glory of God.
? from *The Lenten Pharmacy* by Fr. Ed Hays

 Prayer:

O God of highways and alleyways,
the weary road of life is crowded
with those carrying their crosses.
Many are flogged and shamed by poverty,
abused by old age, alcohol, and drugs.
Others are weighted down by a lack of education,
good medical care or decent jobs.

Do we pretend we are merely spectators,
innocently minding our own business?
Or, Beloved Savior,
does your Spirit within us
inspire us to step forward and lift up their heavy crosses,

adding them to ours,
as once, long ago, Simon of Cyrene did for you?

This week's mantra:
May I be a living incarnation of Christ
who lifted the burdens of the hungry and sick, the lame and blind.

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