

My soul is sorrowful even to death (Mt 14:34)

Javier Álvarez-Ossorio ssc
Superior General

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Jesus

Easter requires crossing the **darkness**. The joy of light only comes at dawn. First, there is the sadness of the night. *“When I awake, let me be filled with your presence”* (Psalm 17:15).

The **Psalms** express the prayer of Jesus, his dialog with the Father. In many Psalms, we hear the soul of Jesus on entering his passion. Those prayers serve us as a door into the feelings of the heart of Christ. Tremble, praying with these words, imagining them in the mouth of Jesus, anguished and sad. I have given you some below. Let us savor them slowly:

Be gracious to me, LORD; see how my foes afflict me! (9:14) Why, LORD, do you stand afar and pay no heed in times of trouble? (10:1) How long will you hide your face from me? (13:2) Give light to my eyes lest I sleep in death, lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed.” (13:4-5) My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? (22:2) Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help. (22:12) Like water my life drains away... My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. (22:15) Do not abandon me to the desire of my foes. (27:12) Make haste to rescue me! (31:3) They conspire together against me; they plot to take my life. (31:14) They hate me without reason. (38:19) Do not be deaf to my weeping! (39:13) my God, do not delay! (40:18) Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord? (44:24) The ruthless seek my life. (54:5) Save me, God, for the waters have reached my neck. (69:2) For it is on your account I bear insult, that disgrace covers my face. (69:8) Come and

redeem my life. (69:19) Insult has broken my heart, and I despair. (69:21) A ruthless band has sought my life. (86:14) All day long my enemies taunt me. (102:9) Friend and neighbor shun me; my only friend is darkness. (88:19)...

In the midst of darkness, Jesus confidently surrenders himself to the love of the Father. That **hope** sustains him. Thus, on Easter morning, the Risen one will be able to sing:

O Lord, my God, I cried out to you for help and you healed me. Lord, you brought my soul up from Sheol; you let me live, from going down to the pit. (30:3-4) For you have snatched me from death, kept my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living. (56:14)

But Easter day does not negate the night of passion, rather it makes it more clear and dramatic. The darkness of Jesus is anguish and sorrow. His sorrow is also **disillusionment**. His friends abandon him. His own have not understood him. The people do not manage to recognize God. He cannot trust anyone. The interests of many others harden their hearts. All efforts to change seem futile. Hatred and resentment could be used for protection, but Jesus continues to love in spite of everything, and for that reason his soul ends up being *"sorrowful even unto death"* (Mk 14:34).

The Good Father

This year Easter Sunday falls on March 27, the anniversary of the death of the Good Father. It is only a coincidence, but it made me think of how the Good Father also went through darkness and sorrow in his journey of faith.

The Good Father was able to show great enthusiasm in happy times (like when the Congregation was recognized by the Holy See or when we were entrusted with the first overseas missions). But, above all, the Good Father showed the strength of his faith in difficult moments, which were more numerous. This strength is based on trust in Providence, on faith in the kind-hearted love of God and on the conviction that we have to **participate in the sufferings of the cross of Christ**. "We are made to be ill-treated here below, as followers of the suffering of the Heart of the Good God" (12/23/1824, letter to Martin Calmet). "Can the children of the cross hope for anything other than crosses, together with the sweetness of grace that makes one love their bitterness?" (10/14/1803, letter to Sister Gabrielle de la Barre).

This strength, however, also reveals the **pain of disillusionment** and the sorrow caused by the vanity of human beings. On August 4, 1804, he writes to Sister Gabrielle de la Barre, "Don't trust any human support; the best only know how to make noise and even their ardor, in the most arduous tasks, produce nothing more than smoke. I have experienced that, here below, all is disillusionment".

That sorrow will get worse in the last years of his life, but it never succeeds in conquering his faith in God nor in his warm-hearted affection toward the brothers and sisters.

Us

Speaking of the temptations of pastoral workers, Pope Francis warns us of a “**faint melancholy**, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart” when one finds oneself “disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves”. This melancholy ends up robbing the joy of evangelization (*Evangelii Gaudium* 83). There is a pleasure in the bitterness and disappointment caused by sin itself, a sick pleasure (cf. Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 2016, chapter VI). It is the pleasure of the skeptic who sarcastically judges others’ efforts of conversion.

It seems to me that another equally strong temptation exists, which attacks us on the opposite flank; **naive enthusiasm**, which consists of uncritically thinking that all that we do is lead by the Spirit of God and can only produce good fruit. This temptation makes us feel important, and raises our self-esteem, but it locks us in our own little world of affairs, and prevents our necessary confrontation with a reality that is tremendously cruel and disillusioning.

In order to celebrate Easter appropriately, **let us enter into the sorrow of Jesus**. Through our charism, we are called to enter into the pain of his heart and to see reality from his wounds. Let us feel the heartbreak of evil, of what does not work, of the suffering of so many people, of sin. If we take refuge in Jesus, this sorrow does not frighten, disillusion does not paralyze. Mysteriously, the sorrow of Jesus leads to an overflowing of kindness and compassion: “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*” (Lk 23:34)

There is no need to hide the misery of the world and our own in order to give a message of hope. On the contrary. As the Suffering Servant in the book of Isaiah says, “*The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary*” (Is 50:4). Seeing reality as it is, with its darkest corners, certainly causes sorrow and disillusion. But, only from this realism, which is true humility, can one stop being self-centered and exercise mercy. Let us not forget that one of the spiritual works of mercy is precisely that of consoling the sorrowful, “to sustain the weary”. He, who knows sorrow, can console. He, who goes through darkness, is able to open his eyes to the light. He, who acknowledges that he is sinking, can be saved.

Happy Easter!

