

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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FORGET WE NOT

by Fr. Preston Westly

THE DESPERATE CRY of the psalmist rings out in Psalm 77. From the depths of his entire being, he calls out, “Will the Lord reject us forever, never again show favor? Has God’s love ceased forever? Has the promise failed for all ages? Has God forgotten mercy, in anger withheld compassion?” He goes on to say, “My sorrow is this, the right hand of the Most High has left us” (8–11).

It’s not unusual to hear similar desperate cries from people suffering painful experiences. Acting alcoholics whose lives are spiraling downward question the cause of their grief. Young people whose lives are curtailed because of illness or accident seek answers: “Why me, Lord?” Those who have lost loved ones ask why God has forgotten his mercy or withheld his compassion.

Scrupulous people who suffer greatly from the penetrating wounds of having a scrupulous conscience search earnestly for peace and ask, “Does God show us his favor no more?” Those suffering from physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual problems at times even get angry at God and ask, “Has his love vanished forever?”



On second thought...

In Psalm 77, the psalmist suddenly stops his lament as he remembers all the good things the Lord has done. He muses on the wonders the Lord has created, the beauty of his works. He recalls the times the Lord had saved his people through the calling of Moses and Aaron.

He remembers, the “waters saw you, God...and lashed about, trembled even to their depths...You led your people like a flock under the care of Moses and Aaron” (17, 21).

The psalmist invites us to stop our own lament and look at the great things the Lord has done. He encourages us to look at the beauty of our world and see the hand of the loving God who created this good earth for us to enjoy. He encourages us to make use of the helps he puts into our lives: the professional medical people who can use their skills to heal us or at least help us live in peace with our malady.

They encourage us to seek out those who can help us understand the spiritual pathway to seren-

ity, who can offer us the sacraments of love and forgiveness to strengthen our faith and increase our hope for inner peace. The psalmist invites us to acclaim the victory of Christ over evil and even death. He invites us to follow our all-powerful Lord in our journey through life to the happiness of living in God's presence.

It works both ways

Scripture relates the story of Job. No matter what happened to him, he kept his face and faith turned to the Lord. And in the end, his confidence was rewarded.

I saw a modern-day example of Job once in an interview with the famous tennis star Arthur Ashe. At a young age, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The interviewer asked whether Ashe ever asked "why me?" or got angry at God. His answer revealed an attitude we should all emulate. He said he never asked God "why me" when he won the Wimbledon championship and received all the glory and acclaim. He certainly wasn't going to change and ask God "why me" because of the cancer. In effect, this respected man of faith expressed his belief that "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21).

Can we follow the example of the psalmist? Certainly we can look at our lives and see the tremendous gifts God has given us. Most of us have family and friendships, ample food and clothing, access to educational and spiritual, mental, and physical health facilities, electronic means of communication, various modes of entertainment and

travel experiences, and much more. Do we lament because we have these God-given gifts? I hope we recognize these things as gifts and take time out every day to thank and praise God for them.

Wanting begets doing

A man who has suffered greatly from scrupulosity for many years tells us a vital truth: We must *want* to come to terms with our scrupulosity in the deepest part of ourselves. He spoke of living on the surface and telling himself and others of his desire to be well, of "wasting" the time of many friends, priests, and therapists because he wasn't willing to do what was necessary. He said he merely went through the motions until one particularly bad day he couldn't stand it any longer.

This day was the turning point in his life, the day he actually began listening to those who wanted to help and actually began earnestly doing the things necessary to achieve peace of mind and soul. He finally was able to face his real fear and begin to trust and believe health was achievable. He was willing to pay the price.

We all are on this journey. Each of us must find our way. Yet we are not alone. A great part of our journey is with others who share the same battles, the same feelings, and the same fears. We can learn from the experiences shared with us by those who have traveled similar paths. Like Solomon in the Old Testament, let us pray for wisdom. Like he did for Solomon, our loving God will grant us the gift of wisdom when we are truly ready to receive it. Fear not!



The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
blessed be the name of the LORD!



Job 1:21

STANDING IN THE STATIONS

The following is adapted from *Grounded in God: A Mature Experience of Faith* by Jim Cavera and Ann Cavera, Liguori Publications, © 2006.

The Stations of the Cross have been a part of my (Jim) Lenten memories since childhood. As a child, I thought this devotion was long and boring. Only in the second half of my life have I come to appreciate the depth of the Stations. The liturgy is the same. My perspective has changed.

I rediscovered this devotion several years ago when I was preparing a talk on life journeys. As I read a pamphlet of Stations of the Cross for the sick, it occurred to me that the Stations are in many ways connected to my own life journey.

In the first Station where Jesus is condemned to death, it is obvious he was misunderstood and unfairly judged. I resent it when someone labels me and doesn't give me a chance. In spite of that, I know I've done the same to others.

I relate the carrying of the cross to my own personal burdens and responsibilities. Certainly mine cannot compare to our Lord's. Yet to me, my burdens feel real and often overwhelming. This insight helps me appreciate the sacrifice of the cross even more.

Three Stations are about falling down. Most of us have fallen and had to get up and face the consequences. The hardest part is that, in spite of our best efforts, it continues to happen. Just when we think we have it all together, a fall reminds us of our frail humanity. Jesus is with us in our falling down *and* in our getting up.

The scene of Jesus meeting his mother speaks to me both as a parent and as a child. As I've grown

older, I've become more aware that, like a child, I'm quite dependent.

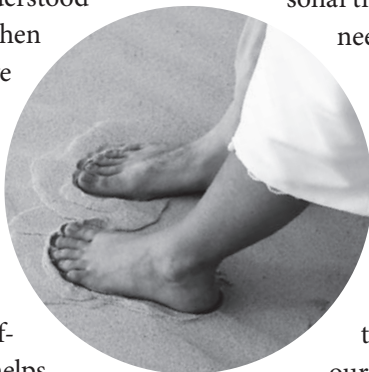
The Stations where Simon helps Jesus carry the cross and Veronica wipes his face lead me to acknowledge that, after spending my life as a "giver," it's hard for me to receive help from others. If our Messiah could accept help and comfort from Simon and from Veronica, why can't *I* become a gracious receiver? These Stations force me to look at why I have to be in control.

The scene of Jesus showing concern for the weeping women tells me that, even in the darkest of personal times, I must keep my sights on others' needs rather than on my own misery.

The tenth Station depicts Jesus being stripped of worldly values: his good name, his dignity, even his only garment. When you get right down to it, what do material things mean? Hospice patients can tell you things accumulated in life mean little at the end. Often possessions blur our vision of truth and reality. Wisdom disguised as suffering can be a great teacher.

I asked myself whether I'm part of the final Stations that depict the crucifixion and death of our Lord and the laying of his body in the tomb. Accounts of a black man dragged to his death and a gay man brutally tortured and murdered remind us that crucifixion still happens. I abhor the evil side of human nature, and I'm disturbed to realize that as a human being I, too, am part of this.

When I look carefully, I find my face in every Station from the false accusations to the tomb.



Dilemma DEPARTMENT

Q *During my confession, the priest said I had confessed enough even though I felt I hadn't explained my sin completely. Does the priest have the authority and the power to limit the number of sins confessed or to prevent one from giving a full explanation of the sin?*

A Yes. When a priest does this, he is letting scrupulous people know their scrupulosity is handicapping them at that moment. He puts on these restrictions sort of as an emergency procedure. Doubting the priest is a part of scrupulosity. Just remember, the priest has put in long hours of study and has experience. The person confessing can trust him. It is also important to remember that it is God who forgives. And God doesn't make mistakes.

Q *I'm so worried about my past confessions. Sometimes I've confessed things as sins even though I didn't know if they really were sinful. Sometimes I would embellish the circumstances of the sin because I thought*

it better to err on the side of a complete picture rather than make light of the situation. Sometimes I would forget some sins or fail to confess them the right way. I have been scrupulous for many years, and now I'm worried about these confessions. How can I be sure my sins have been forgiven?



A You don't have to do anything. Let's face it: Many people have problems in the confessional because they're nervous and/or just plain scared. These feelings affect our memories, the way we express ourselves, and how we act. You didn't try to cover up anything. You didn't try to commit a sacrilege. It is God who forgives, and God knows your good intentions or sorrow. God knows how completely you wanted to make a good confession. God knows how you want to feel secure in your forgiveness. In knowing all of this and more, God, because of his tremendous love for you, forgives you everything. How do we know this? Jesus told us the truth about God's love and forgiveness.

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