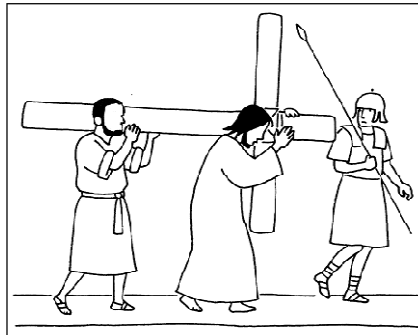


SHARING THE BURDEN OF THOSE WHO SUFFER

...those whose lives express Jesus' never ending
Stations of the Cross.
In them his agony and passion continue.

PRAYING DURING



HOLY WEEK 2011

‘I tell you solemnly,
in so far as you did this to one of the least
of these brothers and sisters of mine,
you did it to me’.

Matthew 25:40

MONDAY

Sharing the burden of the homeless

One of the scribes then came up and said to him,
'Master, I will follow you wherever you go'.

Jesus replied,
"Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests;
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Matt 8: 19-20

They live on the streets, sleeping rough in all weathers. They can be found at night sheltering in car parks, doorways and even in cemeteries. During the day they sit on the pavements begging. They are the undesirables of our society, sometimes suffering from some form of addiction or mental health problem.

Many say, 'What respectable town wants these people spoiling the view. After all, haven't they brought this on themselves? It really isn't my problem, move them on, anywhere as long as I can't see them.'

*I spend some time reflecting on their plight.
I try to imagine how it must feel to live this way.
No home comforts, no place to call my own.
I turn to the Lord:*

Lord, on this Monday of Holy Week, show me how I can ease the suffering and share the burden of homeless people. May I never judge them. On the day of your birth you had no nursery in which to lay your head, a homeless baby born to parents who were of necessity sleeping rough. During your public ministry you were a 'man of the road', no possessions or bank account, no fixed abode.

You know, you understand.

Help me to find not only compassion but practical ways to help those less fortunate than myself, may they see your love for them reflected in my actions.

*I continue my prayer using my own words.
Moved by the suffering of these people
I speak to the Lord from my heart.*

TUESDAY

Sharing the burden of refugees and asylum seekers

With all my voice I cry to you, Lord,
with all my voice I entreat you, Lord.

I pour out my trouble before you

I tell you all my distress.

I cry to you, O Lord.

I have said: "You are my refuge,
all I have in the land of the living."

Listen then to my cry,
for I am in the depth of distress.

Psalm 142: 1-2, 6-7

They are forced to leave their homes, their possessions, their loved ones, often in fear of their lives. Their journey towards freedom and safety is hazardous. When they finally reach their new country, they are often met with indifference or hostility. They have lost everything and depend on welfare, on aid, on hand-outs. Yet, uprooted and displaced they hold on to their dignity and their dreams .

*I spend some time reflecting on their plight.
I try to imagine their fears, their anxiety, their distress.
I turn to the Lord:*

Lord, on this Tuesday of Holy Week, show me how I can ease the suffering and share the burden of those forced to leave their homes. I know that you, too, had to flee your native land to find safety and escape Herod. You became a refugee, an asylum seeker in Egypt.

You know, you understand.

Help me to find small, practical ways to stand with them and to assure them they can rely on your love. Perfect love casts out all fear.

*I continue my prayer using my own words.
Moved by the suffering of these people
I speak to the Lord from my heart.*

WEDNESDAY

Sharing the burden of those who are oppressed.

Take pity on me, Yahweh, I am in trouble now.
Grief wastes away my eye, my throat, my inmost parts.

For my life is worn out with sorrow, my years with sighs;
My strength yields under misery, my bones are wasting away.

To every one of my oppressors I am contemptible...
My days are in your hand, rescue me from the hands of my enemies
and persecutors; let your face smile on your servant,
save me in your love. Psalm 31 vv 9.10.11a,15.&16

They are the victims of harsh and unfair treatment. They feel weak and vulnerable, unable to stand up to those who treat them so cruelly. Their oppressors come in many guises, not always immediately recognisable as 'the enemy'; they might be a parent or spouse, a neighbour or so called friend.

People can be 'downtrodden' by political or religious organisations, employers or anyone who abuses the authority they have over others.

*I spend some time reflecting on their plight.
I try to imagine their fear and vulnerability,
their sense of impotence.
I turn to the Lord:*

Lord on this Wednesday of Holy Week, show me how I can ease the suffering and share the burden of those who are oppressed. You were fiercely opposed to people being abused in this way, you came 'to set the downtrodden free'.

You know, you understand.

Give me the grace to support those who suffer in this way, if only by taking time to listen to their concerns. Please give me the courage to challenge injustice and bullying wherever I can.

*I continue my prayer, using my own words.
Moved by the suffering of these people
I speak to the Lord from my heart.*

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Sharing the burden of those in desolation.

I cry to you, and you give me no answer;
I stand before you, but you take no notice.
Yet have I ever laid a hand on the poor
When they cried out for justice and calamity?
Have I not wept for all whose life is hard,
Felt pity for the penniless?
I hoped for happiness but sorrow came;
I looked for light, but there was darkness.

Job 30: 20, 24-26

They are in pain. To them, the future looks bleak. They are overcome with a sense of hopelessness. No matter how hard they try, they cannot see a way out of their troubles. They feel drained and wretched. Is it all worthwhile? What is the use? They feel cut off from God.

*I spend some time reflecting on their plight.
I try to imagine their hurt, their despair, their anguish.
I turn to the Lord:*

Lord, on this Maundy Thursday, as evil forces gather around you, show me how I can ease the suffering and share the burden of those in desolation.

I know that when you wash Peter's feet you give me an example so that I can understand how perfect your love is. You promise me happiness in the service of others.

You know, you understand.

Give me the words to encourage them to turn back to you so that, in time, they can again feel the warmth of your love for them.

*I continue my prayer, using my own words.
Moved by the suffering of these people*

GOOD FRIDAY

Sharing the burden of the terminally ill.

Yahweh, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for help,
Do not stay deaf to my crying.
I am your guest, and only for a time,
A nomad like all my ancestors.
Look away, let me draw breath,
Before I go away and am no more.

Psalm 39: 12-13

They are the ones who know they are dying. Each one responds to this reality in their own way. Some are ready to welcome death, and are glad that this time has come. Others are not ready to face death at all and protest strongly. They may not only experience anger, but shock, fear, and sadness.

Yet in the great mystery of dying, their fear is often replaced by courage, acceptance and dignity. They are the ones who console those they are leaving behind.

I spend some time reflecting on their plight.

*Can I even begin to imagine the roller-coaster
of emotions and suffering they may be going through?*

I turn to the Lord:

Lord, on this Good Friday, as I recall the events of your Passion and death, I remember your anguished prayer in Gethsemane,

'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me.

Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine.'

You know, you understand.

Lord, show me how I can share the burden of the terminally ill. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry your cross. Give me the willingness to share the heavy load of those who are seriously ill and facing death.

I continue my prayer, using my own words.

Moved by the suffering of these people

I speak to the Lord from my heart.

HOLY SATURDAY

Sharing the burden of the bereaved

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb" she said "and we don't know where they have put him". [John 20: 1-2]

Their whole world seems to have come to an end. God has called back to him the one they love. Their hopes and dreams, their loving care, all that is over. Instead of frantic activity, there is this great void and this unbearable pain. How can they live now? Does life have meaning anymore?

I spend some time reflecting on their plight.

*I imagine, perhaps I recall, their pain,
their sense of emptiness, their sorrow.*

I turn to the Lord:

Lord, in the barrenness of this Holy Saturday, show me how I can ease the suffering and share the burden of those who are bereaved. I know that when you heard of John the Baptist's death you withdrew to a lonely place to grieve, I know you wept at the sight of the distress of Lazarus' sister.

You know, you understand.

Help me to support the bereaved in their time of loss.

Give me the courage I need to be with them as they try to come to terms with what could have been but never will be.

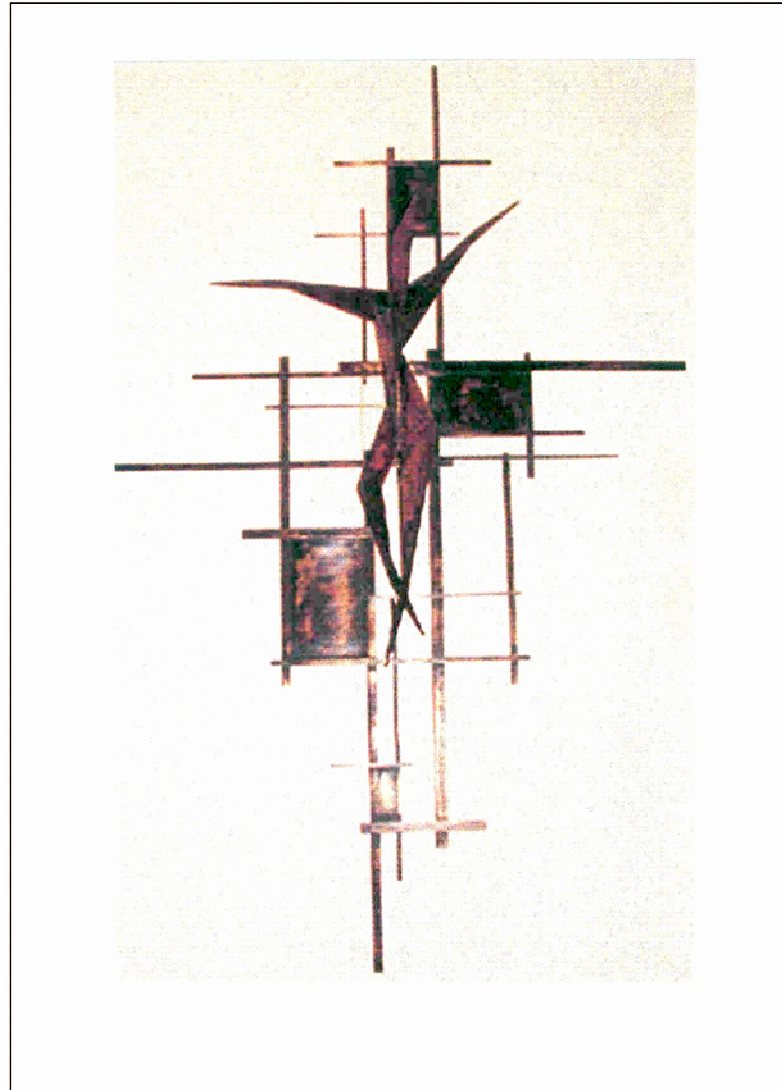
Help me to remain quietly at their side until, in their dark hour, they catch a glimpse of the light of your Resurrection.

I continue my prayer, using my own words.

Moved by the suffering of these people

I speak to the Lord from my heart.

HE IS RISEN!



ALLELUIA!

Crucifix by Rory Geoghegan s.j.—St Beuno's Spirituality Centre