

**March 29, 2013 – Good Friday**  
**Prepared by Sr. Marion Hughes, MM, Musoma, Tanzania**

*Isaiah 52:13--53:12; Psalms 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1--19:42*

Today's reading follows the path Jesus took to heal humankind from sin. Isaiah states in chapter 53:5, 12: "... upon him was the punishment that made us whole and by his bruises we are healed ... yet he bore the sins of many, and made intercessions for the transgressors." Hebrews reinforces the suffering that Jesus endured for our sins and the trust he had in His Father that enabled him to suffer. Jesus knows our weaknesses and feels sympathy. His love and compassion enables us to approach the throne of God where "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The Gospel of John focuses on the abuse that Jesus suffered, the injustice he endured and hints at Jesus's call to all of us to champion nonviolence. In chapter 18:10-11, Peter cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest and Jesus rebukes him, telling Peter to put the sword down, saying, "Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" Throughout the arrest and inquisition of Jesus, never was there a denial of who he was or the fact that he was sent to redeem humankind. Could the disciples have defended Jesus with violence? Theoretically, yes. Could Jesus have done more to defend himself? Yes. But Jesus, with utter reliance on the love and confidence in his Father, was willing to drink the cup of suffering.

Pilate lacked the courage to stand by his conviction that Jesus had done nothing wrong. In the face of the chants and pressure from the high priest and Roman soldiers, Pilate turned Jesus over to them. The beatings, carrying of the cross and eventual crucifixion ensued. Two things which stand out during this time were Jesus' ability to reach out in forgiveness to those who inflicted such suffering and his enduring love and care for those who walked with him in his public life and humiliation. Both are relevant to each one of us today.

Jesus reaches out to those who are torturing him and implores the Father to forgive them "for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). The world today is a mystery of violence: armies fighting rebels; gangs killing innocent bystanders; women being tortured and relocated; children are starved and mutilated; those who stand for justice are murdered or unjustly punished. Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who tortured him. What should be our response to those who act with violence today? True, awareness and forgiveness are part of the nonviolent response. Today's challenge for each of us is to act truly and justly, recognizing the value of each person and the love that Jesus and the Father continue to express to each one. It is within the formation of supportive and loving communities that strength and commitment reign. Witness the coming together of the Newtown, Connecticut community in the face of the horrific shootings of innocent children and adults. Jesus must continue to be our model, to be our source of strength, to be our conviction that God is with us and that love and knowledge will conquer violence

The second thing relevant for us today is Jesus' enduring love and care for those who walked with him in his public life and humiliation. Jesus says to his mother moments before his

death, “Woman, here is your son,” and to John, “Here is your mother.” Jesus made sure his mother and the disciple whom he loved would be cared for as he returned to the Father.

This concern extends to us today. It is a particularly timely message for people in less industrialized countries, especially those ravaged by poverty, war, displacement, AIDS, natural disasters, who are searching for answers, support, compassion and security that their lives are of value and there are people who care. Who is the one the message “here is your son” given to? It is you and me. Are you, am I, willing to hold out a hand to the downtrodden and say, “You are my brother, my sister; my son or daughter”? Are we willing to open our hearts and be willing to speak out in justice to address the issues, challenge those who have the ability and support to move mountains? Are we willing to stand up for those oppressed as Jesus was and work to make their lives wholesome and valued?

Tanzanians have a saying when things seem almost beyond redemption: “Mungu upo” – God is here. It is our heritage to believe God is here and to pass it on to others in hope. On this Good Friday, and in the days to come, let us stand for the values Christ died for and to build a community compassion, love and enduring trust in God.

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200 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

202-832-1780 [ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) [www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)