

## Luke 22:39-46 'For Passion Sunday'

Following his final meal with his disciples Jesus walked to the Mount of Olives to pray. The disciples followed, and he said to them, "Pray that you do not come into the time of trial." Other translations use the word 'temptation'. One possible explanation for this statement may be that he was referring to the situation with Judas - that they should not give in to the same temptation that Judas had. Another interpretation may have referred to the fact that Jesus was aware of what he would soon be facing, and that there was a possibility that his followers might have to experience the same.

There is no doubt that Jesus knew what the next couple of days would bring. He had angered many of the local authorities and understood what the repercussions would be, and there are clues to what he was feeling. First, Luke's text says that he "knelt down, and prayed." Mark's text tells us that he threw himself on the ground. Traditionally, Jews prayed standing up. Throwing himself on the ground, or even kneeling, points to his emotional state. For emphasis we are told his sweat started turning to blood. This is an actual physiological condition called hemosiderosis, which is caused by extreme stress or acute fear. So, his prayer "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me..." should not be taken lightly. Yet, he follows that by saying, "...yet, not my will but yours be done".



What a remarkable statement! He may have had no idea of what the Father's will might be, but still chose to accept it. He placed himself entirely in God's hands! Would we have the faith to do the same?

I once had a former girlfriend ask me if I was willing to die for my faith, and she questioned my faith when I said I didn't know. But, frankly, I don't think any of us can truly answer that question until we are actually in a situation where we would have to make that choice. To unequivocally say yes when there is no present threat is just an expression of spiritual pride! How easy faith is to come by when nothing's on the line!

There's a painting by Paul Gauguin (which I hope we can eventually look at together!) called, 'The Agony in the Garden'. The greater part of the canvas is painted in dark blues and green, with the only splash of bright color being the hair and beard of Jesus in an orangish red. (Kind of a modernist version of a classical painting technique called 'chiaroscuro', which is basically, bright light emerging out of darkness.) The painting was somewhat controversial when it was first exhibited, not because of the technique, but because Jesus' face was actually, Gauguin's face! (Gauguin was a redhead.)

Personally, I don't see the problem. Gauguin was going through a hard time, and it is rather natural in times of trial, of pain, of suffering to identify with Jesus. We know his pain, and he knows ours. In fact, the cross itself should be seen as a symbol of Christ's identification and solidarity with human suffering. Painting one's own portrait on the figure of Jesus may be an extreme way to express the relationship between Jesus' suffering and our own, but it does make sense.

One thing we should take from the Passion story as a whole is, that giving ourselves over to the will of God does not mean that we are thereby exempt from the possibility of pain. Jesus prayed, "your will be done", and wound up on the cross. But then there is also Easter. There is trial, there is pain, there is suffering, but there is also redemption, there is resurrection, there is New Life!

We have a great trial ahead of us. There may be anxiety, there may be fear, there may be loneliness, hopefully no sickness nor death. Jesus knows all these things. He has experienced them himself and knows what we are going through, and he will walk with us every step of the way, leading us in the direction of healing and New Life!

Let us pray: Dear Lord, your will be done. Amen.