

***Vere passum immolatum in Cruce pro homine-  
‘[He] who truly suffered, sacrificed on the Cross for humanity’***

I have been trying hard to make connections between the events of Holy Week and the current COVID-19 crisis and to share with you, to the best of my ability, some words of encouragement and comfort in this time of great trial.

Last night, as I lay in bed, I was listening to Mozart’s Ave Verum and it struck me how often we speak of the death of Jesus in terms of him **“taking our place”**- a substitute for all of us- paying the price of our sins. And yes, that is all true, but have we ever turned this idea on its head and instead sought to take Jesus’ place- to come alongside him in our imagination, reflections and prayers and to follow him more closely- along the dusty road that leads to Calvary?

I found myself asking how Jesus must have felt, as he embraced those dark agonizing hours that led to the Cross- was it a feeling of being abandoned and forsaken that dominated his heart, or a calm trust in God’s deliverance. Perhaps it was a mixture of fear and strength, vulnerability and self-possession that allowed him to go on when all seemed so lost and the future so bleak.

Who we are in moments of trial, has already been decided by who we have been all our lives. Just look at the life of Jesus- its chief characteristic was self-emptying love- agape. So, it is no coincidence that this same agape is now the chief characteristic of his earthly death. Right through the Gospels, we see that love at work in so many ways- the love that feeds a crowd of thousands, even when he is exhausted and disheartened, the love that reaches out and heals the leper in spite of disapproval and danger, the love that defies social convention about those who are untouchable, and the love that defies religious conventions about those who are unacceptable.

It is this life-long, ordinary loving that shapes who Jesus is and what he does in this last week of his life- washing his disciples’ feet, comforting his grieving mother, encouraging his flagging disciples, giving up his spirit. As it is often, it is scripture that puts it best- **“having loved those who were his own in the world, he loved them to the end.”** (John 13:1)

For all of us, these are extraordinary times- times of great trial and loss- times of great generosity and costly self-giving. Over the next few weeks, we will learn something about how each ordinary decision and daily act of generosity has shaped and strengthened us. What we have of selfishness and fear, and of steady, self-giving love, will be writ large, both as individuals, and as a community.

These are our times, and Jesus cannot take our place. But we have much to learn from walking with him this Holy Week, and from walking with one another in these days of grief and hope. If we live them well, we will learn how to grow from

the ordinary to the extraordinary. We will learn that every single person is our neighbor and we will learn all over again how to love those who are our own in the world, and to love them to the end.

As we seek to act with loving concern for others, let us lift up in prayer all whose lives have been changed by the current crisis:

***Lord, we place into your loving hands our families and loved ones, especially those who are elderly or sick, anxious or lonely. You know their needs, and we ask you to be close to them.***

***We place into your hands all in our medical and emergency services, and all whose daily work protects and sustains us- we give thanks for them and we ask you to uphold them in health, strength and courage.***

***We pray for those in leadership and governance during these days- we ask you to give them the wisdom to lead and to listen, and the vision to act for the common good.***

***We pray for ourselves as a community. Now, more than ever, we recognize our dependence on one another. Teach us how to grow in solidarity, in gratitude, and in care for each another. You have loved each of us into life and counted every hair on our heads. We place in your hands those who have died. Stay with us in our sorrow and give us hope in this time of trial.***

So, let me end this reflection with the closing words of the ***Ave Verum***, as they remind us that in the mystery of the incarnation Christ Jesus came not just to take our place, but that we might each be immersed in the very mystery of God's eternal life and mercy.

***O Iesu dulcis, O Iesu pie, O Iesu, fili Mariae. Miserere mei. Amen  
O sweet Jesus, O holy Jesus, O Jesus, son of Mary, have mercy on me.  
Amen.***

*Fr. James*

**[Holy Week & Easter Schedule \(LiveStream only\)](#)**

**Holy Thursday, April 9:** Mass of the Lord's Supper 7pm

**Good Friday, April 10:** Veneration of the Cross 1:30pm; Stations of the Cross: All Day

**Holy Saturday, April 11:** Easter Vigil Mass: 7pm

**Easter Sunday, April 12: Mass (English) 10:30am; (Spanish) 12 noon**

**[Easter Meal Blessing Resource for Use at Home](#)**

**Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19:** Holy Hour at 2:45pm

*Your Prayer intentions for Divine Mercy Sunday:* You may drop off your prayer petitions in the basket in the gathering space of church or email them to: [stfreled@stfrancisa2.org](mailto:stfreled@stfrancisa2.org) and they will be included in the Divine Mercy Holy Hour.

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