

# ***Inscape April 2016***

© Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!**

## **TRUSTING GOD IN TIME OF SUFFERING**

April 3<sup>rd</sup> is the third Sunday of the Great Fast, also the Cross Veneration Sunday. Saint Mark in his gospel reminds us of Jesus' words; "And Jesus called the people together with his disciples, and said to them, He who wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the sake of my gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

Jesus did not come to give answers to our many problems, especially the one about why we have to suffer so much in this life. He clearly distinguishes between (1) evils that God could not create and still be true to his nature as loving us, his children; and (2) sufferings, which he taught we must accept when they come into our lives, and also crosses that we must willingly embrace, as he did—crosses that result from obeying his command to love him and others as he loved us.

We are to study his actions, as recorded in the New Testament, and to reflect on his teachings, especially his parables, in order to move into the hidden world of faith, which alone can encounter mystery beyond all human understanding, and to respond in childlike trust to God's call to deeper union with the risen Lord.

## **JESUS IN THE GOSPELS**

In the Gospels we often find Jesus being confronted with the problem of evil and suffering. Representative of his approach to such a problem is the incident of the Pharisees asking Jesus to explain why the man was born blind. The Pharisees offered the common belief among the Jews at that time: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" (John 9:2).

The answer that Jesus gave is one of faith, not logic. "He was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). The man is healed. His very blindness is turned into a manifestation of Christ as the light of the world and the one who initiates people into the Kingdom of God, away from the power of sin and death of the kingdom of darkness.

Suffering, in the teaching of Jesus, is never the result of a moral evil that transgresses God's holy will. Two men looked out from prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars. Suffering is a pain that can be turned into good or evil according to the way we perceive it. Saint Peter in his first epistle teaches us how to accept sufferings as means to encounter the victory of the risen Lord Jesus. "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth as his sons, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be kept from you in the heavens. Through your faith, God's power will guard you until the salvation which has been prepared is revealed at the end of time. This is a cause of great joy for you, even though you may for a short time have to bear being plagued by all sorts of trials; so that, when Jesus Christ is revealed, your faith will have been tested and proved like gold—only it is more

precious than gold, which is corruptible even though it bears testing by fire—and then you will have praise and glory and honor” (1 Peter 1:3-8).

This Christian faith, through trusting hope in the power of the risen Lord Jesus, can transform by his Spirit what seemingly appears as failure, evil and negativity into life-giving, eternal joy. As Saint Paul writes: “By faith we are judged righteous and at peace with God, since it is by faith and through Jesus that we have entered this state of grace in which we can boast about looking forward to God’s glory. But this is not all we can boast about; we can boast about our sufferings. These sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:1-5).

### **LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS**

The Suffering Servant of Yahweh, Jesus Christ, true (perfect) God and true (perfect) man, now becomes better understood by us, not through our human logic, but with purified hearts through the Spirit, who enlightens us to this knowledge that is beyond all human understanding there is light in the darkness of Jesus’ *kenosis* or self-emptying love.

It is not just that he *had* to suffer and die in order to save us from eternal death. Throughout his whole life Jesus freely chose, when there were possibilities, to descend into the heart of human beings who were lost to God’s love. He chooses to descend into the suffering, dying heart of humanity. He freely wishes to become the poorest of the poor, the loneliest of all abandoned human beings. His love for the Father burns so strongly within him that he goes into the dregs of humanity and desires to become a part of the lowest of the lowliest.

As the prophet Isaiah foretold, he wills to be crushed as a worm beneath the cruel heel of this world, which crushes so many other men and women. He freely wills, by his human choice, to taste every ingredient in the bitter chalice that the world, in which the mystery of evil rules, can press to human lips.

He did not ignore human anguish but took it upon himself. He did not come to eradicate from our earthly lives all our sufferings and evils. He came to walk the path of all human sufferings. He not only images the passionate love the heavenly Father has for us by dying in human form out of love for us, but he freely consents to take upon himself our sins and infirmities to suffer with us and for us.

Deutero-Isaiah had prophesized that the coming Messiah would associate with us in our sins and sufferings: “Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with sufferings,...And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:2-5).

### **FLESH OF SIN**

In becoming human Jesus came under the Law. Taking on our human nature and born as we are, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, has also associated and taken upon himself our “flesh of sin.” Saint Paul clearly teaches that Jesus became incarnate to take our sins upon himself so that we could live by our higher nature. “God dealt with sin by sending his own Son in a body as physical as any sinful body, and in that body God condemned sin. He did this in

order that the Law's just demands might be satisfied in us, who behave not as our unspiritual nature, but as the Spirit dictates" (Romans 8:3-4).

He, the just and the righteous One in whom there is no sin, stands in our sinful and unrighteous place.

Saint Paul writes that Jesus justified us by his blood (Romans 5:9). The blood, for Saint Paul and for us, should symbolize the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf. In giving us Jesus as our propitiation-victim, God shows us how great is his love for us and his desire to share his very own life forever unto our perfect happiness.

As we contemplate prayerfully Christ's suffering and death, freely taken upon himself for our sakes, we see what it costs God to be righteous and true to his nature in his hatred for sin. He wishes to destroy sin by his Son incarnating all sinfulness of humanity. The Father shows his righteous disdain for self-centeredness, the root of all sin and moral evil. We begin to understand only in Christ, suffering on the cross unto his death, what sin is and how God, by his very nature ("God is Love"; 1 John 4:8), must resist it. Only in Jesus can we see God's full judgment on sin. Only in him can sin be taken away by the blood of the Lamb of God.

We no longer need fear God's judgment upon us for our sins. We need only fear that we do not believe in God's righteousness, which Jesus won for us. And we openly show to God and the world around us whether we are righteous and living in God's righteousness by living in the power of the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit, and no longer living in guilt and sin.

### **TRUE CHILDREN OF GOD**

As living members of Jesus' body, we live by our uniqueness in Jesus; we obey all his commandments to bring forth works of love that flow out of our new, regenerated nature. Freed by Christ from the ancestral curse and slavery to sin, we Christians become slaves to righteousness and to God, as Saint Paul writes in Romans (6:15-23). We live in the continued experience that we are children of God, even now.

The Son of the heavenly Father, of one substance with him, by the incarnation is able to suffer and die as a man. His sufferings are truly human, just as ours are. He "has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Yet Jesus who suffers and truly dies, is also the Only-Begotten Son.

This is what transforms Saint Paul: he experienced in his sufferings his sinfulness, and yet, in the resurrectional presence of Jesus the Lord dwelling within him, he found the strength to bear all sufferings that came to him. "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake" (Galatians 2:20-21).

Jesus describes the process of dying that is at the heart of accepting all sufferings with faith: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35; cf. Matthew 10:38-39; 16:24-25; Luke 9:23-24; 14:27).

He insisted that the grain of wheat had to fall to the ground and die or else it remained only a grain. Only the dying process would release the great potential of bringing forth new life. Only by living out our baptism, or Passover from slavery into the trials of the desert of the heart, can we enter into the New Jerusalem, a sharing even now in God's life.

Sufferings, trials and tribulations are occasions for us to move beyond our own self-centered views that only the Holy Spirit can infuse into the meek and humble of heart.

Yet how difficult this is to accomplish! We dread entering into our innermost selves. We fear we might just have to trust *only* in God and destroy all the idols that we have constructed in our minds of a God who can never even be given a name. “The longest journey is the journey inward, of him who has chosen his destiny. Who has started his quest for the source of his being” (Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings*, p 58).

### LET ALL THINGS PRAISE THE LORD

God’s loving presence is unveiling himself and calling us to a return of love in a faith response in the context of every event of every moment. Such events embrace all happenings, to which we can react in several ways, summarized by Saint Paul as from a “carnal mind.” We limit God’s inbreaking love by interpreting the event according to our own center of reference. We find pleasure in certain circumstances and wish more of it. Other events bring us suffering and pain, and we want to avoid such moments. We seek to throw off such burdens as soon as possible. Suffering to us is a seeming evil to be avoided like a plague. “Bow down, then, before the power of God now, and he will raise you up on the appointed day; unload all your worries on to him, since he is looking after you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

But by faith we can move beyond the surface and appearances of the event to touch the loving hand of the heavenly Father, who arranges all things sweetly through his providential care for us, and to praise him in all events. For such Christians, as we should humbly aspire to be, all things truly serve to glorify God. The weather of this day, regardless of how it upsets our plans, can become a point of praising God. How difficult it is to join the three young men in the book of Daniel to praise God in the frost and cold! “All things the Lord has made, bless the Lord: give glory and eternal praise to him....Cold and heat! ... Frost and cold! ... Ice and snow! Bless the Lord” (Daniel 3:57,67,69,70).

Physical evils are all those found in the temporal order of nature such as sickness, infirmities, physical poverty, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, wars, floods, droughts, freezing cold, blazing hot weather, and so on. The list is almost endless. The final and greatest physical evil that will touch all of us, eventually, is death.

And yet whether we can discern what is willed or permitted by God, we must lovingly accept the merciful presence of God, even when we cannot understand what good could ever come out of such events.

### MORAL EVILS

Theologians include in the category of moral evils all forms of sinfulness due to the free resistance of men and women to God’s will. When we turn away in disobedience, we create moral evil, a thing God could never create; it separates us from the loving union with God. But our human sins have repercussions as well on the physical level of nature and in the lives of plants, animals and human beings, as we see today in the ecological problems caused chiefly by human greed.

Think of the destructive, physical evils released by a Hitler, a Stalin, a Kim Jong-un, a Muammar al-Gaddafi. Consider the explosion of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives and has had untold repercussions in nature and the lives of future generations. Ponder the silent murder of millions of unborn, aborted babies in America and throughout the entire world...in the name of human choice.

We live in fear of nuclear destruction and terrorist attacks by the will of human beings. There was a time when we thought we could be concerned with our own sufferings and not

those of others, especially in poorer, oppressed countries. Today we realize that we are all interconnected, not only for our survival, but also for mutual enrichment.

In an earlier age men and women could trust in God's providential care without much awareness of anything beyond a passive acceptance of a situation in trust. Today our universe presents the problem of sufferings and evils in a way that demands from us a different response.

## **A GLOBAL VILLAGE**

Nuclear warfare; genocide; terrorism, global starvation; multinational corporations, which bleed and rape the resources of Third-World countries to make the poor poorer and the illiterate more illiterate; the unequal distribution of food stuffs, where so many countries have so much and others have so very little; all of these issues and many more should move us to a different understanding of evil and the purpose of suffering. Such sufferings should call us to become angry, as Jesus was wherever he encountered evil, either brought about by the invisible, satanic forces or by evil human beings.

Today Christ is calling us to fill up the sufferings of Christ in his body, the Church, which is the leaven of what the whole world is called to become in Christ, its head. This way of redemptive suffering is the way of the cross, which Jesus invites all his disciples to carry with him. It is not sufficient, nor should it ever have been thought to have been sufficient in times past, for Christians only to question and wonder with the rest of the human race why God does not eradicate sufferings from the world, along with the evils that affect so many innocent persons. If the Master had to suffer and die in order to enter into glory, so we too must, but always out of love for others.

God evidently does not remove all sufferings from our lives just because we say prayers with this in mind. But he promises in Christ Jesus always to be with us unto the consummation of the world and to suffer with us. Jesus-risen makes it possible for us to experience the fundamental law of true love; namely, that the more we surrender in this life and in heaven to live in self-sacrificing love for another, the more we experience a new-founded sense of dying and rising, of possessing a new share in the glorious life of Jesus-risen.

C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*, admirably captures this truth: "As to its fellow-creatures, each soul, we suppose, will be eternally engaged in giving away to all the rest that which it receives. And, as to God, we must remember that the soul is but a hollow which God fills. Its union with God is, almost by definition, a continual self-abandonment, an opening, an unveiling, a surrender of itself...We need not suppose that the necessity for something analogous to self-conquest will ever be ended, or that eternal life will not also be eternal dying. It is in this sense that, as there may be pleasures in hell (God shield us from them), there may be something not at all unlike pains in heaven (God grant us soon to taste them)."

## **GOD DISCIPLINES US THROUGH SUFFERINGS**

Before we can grasp in loving trust the beauty of suffering in order to fill up the sufferings of Christ, let us see the oft-repeated reason found in the Old and New Testaments of why God not only permits evils and our own sins to happen, but why God also actively causes certain pains and sufferings to happen to us.

God can surely act on our behalf as he wishes and when he wishes, but we must believe from his revelation that, if he is love by nature, he always acts only out of love for us. Many of the evils and sufferings that we encounter come about either by God's permissive will in matters of moral evil since God does not withdraw his sustaining presence as primary cause

even in matters of sin, or by God's active working, but always to draw us closer to him, the ultimate source of all our happiness.

God, in Sacred Scripture, says without any ambivalence, "I *am* the one who *reproves and disciplines all those he loves*" (Revelation 3:19; Proverbs 3:12). Hebrews quotes the text from Proverbs 3:12 and most fully presents this common teaching about God's loving discipline in our regard: "Suffering is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. If you were not getting this training, as all of you are, then you would not be *sons* but bastards. Besides, we have all had our human fathers who punish us, and we respect them for it; we ought to be even more willing to submit ourselves to our spiritual Father, to be given life. Our human fathers were thinking of this short life when they punished us, and could only do what they thought best; but he does it all for our own good, so that we may share his own holiness. Of course, any punishment is most painful at the time, and far from pleasant; but later, in those on whom it has been used, it bears fruit in peace and goodness (Hebrews 12: 7-11).

As gold is tested and purified in the fire of a furnace, so God puts his people to the test to make them worthy to be his chosen ones. A beautiful image of the "shaping" of us by God is that of the potter and the clay: "All His ways are according to His good pleasure. Like clay in a potter's hand. Thus men are in the hand of Him who made them, to render to them according to His judgment" (Sirach 33:13).

### **TRUSTING ABANDONMENT IN SUFFERINGS**

The Old Testament offers us many outstanding examples of faith and trusting abandonment. Saint Paul appeals to Abraham (Romans 4:18-25) as the model of faith and hope in God in adversities whose meaning escapes our human understanding. The patriarch Joseph was faithful to God's guiding love when his brothers threw him into a well and sold him as a slave to Ishmaelite merchants for 20 pieces of silver (Genesis 37:28). Joseph speaking to his brothers; "...Fear not; for I am a servant of God. But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to do as he has done this day, to save many lives" (Genesis 50:20). Tempted by Potiphar's wife, he remained faithful to God, his strength in times of trial. God used him, then, to save his people in a great famine, but more importantly, to raise him up as a type of the Messiah to come, Jesus.

King David, both in his sins and in his abandonment by his friends and supporters, learned how to hope in Yahweh as the sole true source of all strength and blessing (Psalms 27:14). If we follow David's trust in God, we too will hearken to his voice and meet him in our troubles: "I rescue all who cling to me, I protect whoever knows my name, I answer everyone who invokes me, I am with them when they are in trouble; I bring them safety and honor. I give them life, long and full, and show them how I can save" (Psalms 91:14-16).

But when God's word became flesh and dwelt among us, we received the perfect revelation of abandoning ourselves to God in any solicitude or anxiety. Besides, he pours out into our hearts his Holy Spirit to enable us in all trials to trust in him, the Way to the Father and to eternal life.

Jesus teaches us the reason we can abandon ourselves trustingly to God. We need only seek God's kingdom, letting him have sovereign control in our lives, and then all temporalities will be given to us. "Your Father well knows you need them" (Luke 12:30).

In our variety of lifestyles, we should trust in God as we rid ourselves of excessive worries and attachments to our possessions, because we believe in God's fatherly love and care for us, and will move us to give to the needy whatever is beyond our moderate needs. And that alone will bring us much suffering as we war against those forces deep within us that want to have power by the possession of "things."

## **TRUST IN SICKNESS AND IN DEATH**

Our health is a gift given to us by God whereby we can grow in deep, personal relationships of love with others. We can be of loving service through our health. Health helps us to pray well, to travel and pursue many enriching human experiences. But trust in time of sickness can bring us to believe that the lack of health also can be a gift. If God permits sickness and even death to happen to us, or even wills it, he is really wishing us not sickness as an end, or suffering; rather, he is wishing us greater health (restoration to wholeness), an opportunity to become purified to enter into a greater union with him, which will lead us into more total happiness to living as participators in God's very own life (theosis, divinization).

When the physical powers of our body, senses, intellectual acumen, memory, and so on begin to lessen, we have the graceful opportunity to experience our creatureliness and inner poverty before God. All other virtues—especially greater faith, hope and love toward God—develop if we utilize such sufferings to open to God as our sole strength.

## **PRAYING FOR HEALING**

Jesus has clearly taught us to ask anything of the Father and it would be granted as we believed. But this petition is to be asked in the name and according to the mind of Jesus. He prayed with childlike trust not to die on the cross, yet he used the very agony as he faced imminent death to surrender in loving trust to whatever his heavenly Father wished for him.

Before we pray for such healing, we must first discern whether we should ask for such and such. As we pray, we enlarge our hearts and petitions. If we believe a healing and longer life would be to God's greater glory, we must also open ourselves to receive from the Holy Spirit a deeper infusion of faith, hope and love.

From such a prayer of faith, individually prayed or in a group, we can begin thanking God not only for the healing of the spirit by deeper faith, but also for a more total healing according to the loving mind of God in his wisdom. In this life, in the providence of God embracing all of his creation, the increased healing is not always manifested in a bodily or psychical healing. Yet the very continued presence of the suffering is now a source of greater grace, happiness and spiritual health that will enhance the body and soul healing in the life to come.

## **SUFFERING IN THE KINGDOM**

We are always in need of deep trust in God in moments of suffering and humiliation and persecution inflicted upon us by others because of our Christian principles. Jesus pronounced a special blessing on such: "Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad. For your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

Saint Paul also tells us that we will be called to suffer for the sake of Christ, "You are well aware, then, that anybody who tries to live in devotion to Christ is certain to be attacked" (2 Timothy 3:12). Recognizing the difficulty of remaining loving toward those who inflict sufferings upon us, we must allow Jesus and his Spirit to bring us healing of our aggressive pride and selfishness.

As we lovingly and joyfully accept such adversities from others acting upon us, we begin to see them no longer as mere crosses, but as steps to a new transformation into Christ. We receive strength in deeper faith, hope and love to praise God for such happenings as we grow in greater gentleness and humility to God's loving presence and active concern for us. We may

never like such sufferings, just as Jesus surely did not like his sufferings as he hung on the cross, but we can experience the blessings that flow from them when we abandon ourselves to let Jesus be Lord (Kyrios) in such suffering occasions.

### **FILLING UP THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST**

But there is still a higher motive for trusting God in our sufferings, especially those to be experienced in our own dying and death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come to die” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 99). This is nothing but a paraphrase of Christ’s invitation to his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him.

Saint Peter teaches us the necessity of suffering, not because we have done wrong, but out of obedience to Christ’s teachings (1 Peter 3:14-17). If Jesus wanted his disciples to expect persecutions for his name’s sake, then it is important to understand the relationship of our sufferings to Christ’s sufferings and communion with him, our head and risen-Lord, and with all members of the Body of Christ.

Saint Paul boldly declares, “It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Colossians 1:24). This text has always been difficult to understand in its fullest sense. In what way can Paul or we think Christ’s sufferings are incomplete and that we can fill them up? We must reject any false understanding that would imply Christ’s personal sufferings in his passion and death were insufficient for our redemption and that we would need to fill up the necessary sufferings.

### **MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

If we keep in mind Saint Paul’s powerful analogy of the church as similar to a human body made up of many members and each member composed of cells that are interrelated with all other living cells of the entire body, then we may be able to understand a higher motive for accepting our sufferings joyfully. We become sharers in Christ’s sufferings because Christ makes his passion and death through his resurrection available to us insofar as he has taken upon himself all our sins and sufferings through his sufferings on the cross. Through faith in Christ’s passion we find redemption that is fresh and being applied to us through his ever-present dying and rising existence as head of his members in his body, the Church. This is most perfectly symbolized in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and climaxed in the reception of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, unto the healing of our body and soul.

If we unfold the sufferings of Christ when we accept them in loving union with Christ-Risen, we also to that degree witness and aid in bringing the resurrection of Christ to fulfillment in his body, the Church. Communion in Christ’s passion is the same as suffering to build up God’s Kingdom in this world. Saint Paul writes, “Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so, through Christ, does our consolation overflow” (2 Corinthians 1:5).

We should make our daily experience the prayer that Saint Paul makes: “All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11).

### **BUILDING THE BODY OF CHRIST**

As believers, therefore, our sufferings should never be independent of Christ’s. As Christ once underwent his unique, individual sufferings, so now he endures or shares in our daily

sufferings, for he will always now be one with the members of his body, the Church. What we suffer in him and for him, out of love in his Spirit, he, as head, also suffers in the same Spirit that makes him one with all his members.

Such human sufferings also have an eschatological effect. Our trials and tribulations, accepted in loving care and active responsibility to lessen the sufferings of other human beings, help to bring about the future of the fulfilled Christ, the Total Christ! This includes the head in his members. But also, in the very moment of our accepting sufferings out of love for each other, we also share in a corporate raising of the entire body to a higher level of loving union with Christ the head.

Although we modern Christians know Jesus Christ alone is the mediator of the human race with the heavenly Father, yet we know through God's transforming grace what God has made of us in Christ Jesus. "It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). We are called into the awesome redemptive work by the merits of Jesus Christ to reconcile the sinful world back to God. Jesus Christ has worked a purification in us through sufferings so we can already triumphantly cry out with Saint Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake" (Galatians 2:19-20).

### **CHRIST'S SUFFERING PRESENCE TO THE WORLD**

Jesus shares his divine life with us (2 Peter 1:4), as he lives in us, as the vine is the life-giving source to the living branch. He is the head; we, in whom Jesus lives, make up his body. We are totally new in him and share in his power to intercede before the throne of the Father. He "raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). We have been empowered to use his merits and his name, which is the only name whereby we shall be saved. It is his mediation, his intercession, that we share as we too groan in the Spirit of Jesus on behalf of a race of people that has forgotten God.

Like Abraham, we beg, not on our own merits, but because of God's goodness made known through Jesus Christ, that men and women, cities and nations, the sick and the suffering, the mentally confused and the disturbed be spared, be healed, and be reconciled with God.

### **INCARNATING THE GOOD SAMARTAN**

How can the suffering world be enlightened to the power of accepting their sufferings in and for Christ, unless they see him again teaching and acting out the parable of the Good Samaritan, the good neighbor, to the first person he meets as his brother or sister in need? How can others see the Risen-Jesus, except by seeing him in us?

How can we pause and bring healing love to the suffering whom we meet, unless we have learned to suffer meaningfully in Christ, the crucified Risen-Lord? Only then can we become the good Samaritan to those who suffer in wasted pain by being the one who shows active mercy and compassion by making a gift of ourselves because, humbly, by God's grace, we have learned that the course of suffering leads to glory. Death to selfishness is to share in Christ's resurrection in this present moment by doing whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters and knowing we *really* do these things to Christ!

May humanity recognize that "Christ is among us!"—"He is and Always shall be!"

*Father John Michael Zboyovski*