

## Suffering During Lent

### A Good Friday Reflection based on Luke 23:26-47

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Luke 23:26-47 tells the story of Jesus' suffering as he hung on the cross. Though not to the degree of Jesus' agony, last year the whole world experienced a kind of suffering unprecedented in our lifetime. As a result, this year Christians come to Good Friday with a more profound sense and understanding of suffering.

Lent has taken on new meaning since the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year Lent wasn't about deciding what small token we could give up, or what spiritual discipline we could begin, or even where we could find the best fish fry. For we had a heightened awareness that people in our neighborhoods, our country, and our world were suffering. The suffering was widespread: families couldn't be together, even for important life events; illness and death tolls from the coronavirus were rising among family, friends, and strangers; churches had to close their buildings and turn to virtual worship before, during, and after Holy Week; and businesses had to close, causing many to lose jobs. We were suffering, if not for ourselves, for those around us. People are still suffering—in many, many ways from many, many causes.

God understands our suffering, for he sent his only begotten son to suffer for our salvation . . . and agonized as a father does when watching—even co-experiencing—the suffering of his child. Jesus certainly understands suffering, for after being beaten and flogged he obediently made the walk to Calvary and his death on the cross. This completely innocent man had his hands and feet nailed to a cross for crucifixion—the most disgraceful and grievous form of execution, reserved for the worst of all offenders.

But how did he respond to his suffering? Hung between two thieves, mocked and taunted, Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." In the midst of his pain, Jesus asked God to forgive the ones who deserved punishment. To forgive *us*. Jesus, the Holy One of God, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, voluntarily took upon himself the curse that should have been ours. And so the emblem of horror and shame became for us the symbol of new life and salvation. Today, stand a while at the foot of the cross, the place where our new life began. Reflect on your own life. Are there sins you can lay down at the foot of the cross? How can you live into a life of faith, a life that exemplifies behavior like Christ's? Easter is coming, but don't rush to get there too quickly. Thank Jesus for all that he has sacrificed so that you—so that we—might have eternal life. Thanks be to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.