

“And what of suffering?” -- Helen Ackermann

Recently, I have been reading a book titled, *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice* by Helen Cepero. She provides in her book a number of suggestions that might assist one in the practice of journaling. Since I like to write, I have found her suggestions helpful as I develop this part of my prayer life. The chapter called “Embracing the Cross,” includes the suggestion to read the Passion of Jesus Christ as found in Scripture. She says to spend some time with the various stations as found in the gospels. I did so beginning with the Agony in the Garden.

It seems that the Agony in the Garden speaks so very intimately to all of us as we struggle with times in our lives when we feel we are suffering deeply. We feel abandoned and alone, we feel that we cannot go on, and we feel despondent. The despondency of Jesus is reflected in these words from Mark, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.” Prior to this prayer to his father, Mark says, “he took with him Peter, James and John and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch.’ He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him.” I always thought that his prayer was about avoiding what was to come but then I began to think that perhaps the prayer of Jesus is not about his fear of what is to come, but rather that he prays for peace in the midst of the suffering; that he lets go of his anxiety and enters fully into what will happen. In that way he fulfills the will of the Father.

Letting go of our control of various situations that bring about suffering in our lives and rather entering into unity with God gives us the courage and peace of mind that enables us to bear whatever it is that needs to be endured. Things don’t have to change but rather our attitudes toward the suffering needs to change.