



WEEK ONE: The Agony in the Garden

Praying with the Sorrowful Mysteries: Jesuit Communications offers a series of reflections around the five Sorrowful Mysteries. **This week, we explore the Agony in the Garden.**



Trevisani. Agony in the Garden.

Gospel reading: Luke 22:39-44

Reflection

Jesus is in great sorrow, trial and turmoil in the first mystery - the Agony in the Garden. He wrestles in prayer with what lies ahead. Jesus' sweat becomes as drops of blood. He enters prayer such that the cup of suffering may be removed, but only if it is the Father's will. As Jesus opposes a 'malign spiritual power', Brendan Byrne comments that 'the only way to emerge victorious is through intense union with God'. When we undergo great suffering, let us recall Jesus' way forward. This is the day of decision, when we receive consolation through our trust in the Father.

- 1 How does Jesus' garden anguish reveal his approach to suffering?
- 2 Reflecting back on your own life, when have you wrestled your way into a closer union with God?
- 3 What personal turmoil now calls you to ask for the peace of the Holy Spirit?
- 4 As you discern God's will, how is God inviting you to trust?
- 5 Peter Fleming writes of his mother Gwennie's heroism as she lay dying, wanting 'to remain a sign of faith' for her children and grandchildren. Who does she remind you of?

Using these resources

Parishes and prayer groups: Feel free to print out and share these reflections, attach them to parish bulletins, or post them on parish websites or Facebook pages.



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#seasonofconsolation



To die well

Peter Fleming remembers another garden, through the window of a ground-floor room where his mother lay dying.

Each morning, the sun would search out the azaleas, making their cheeks blush. Strange, how closely aligned are beautiful and painful things.

St Paul tells us that this earthly tent we call the body will be re-invented as a solid home in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1), but that is a metaphor for something that Gwennie – Mary Gwentyth Fleming, my mother - was now facing for real.

I asked her what especially she feared. Her reply: 'Not being able to see all of you.'

I sensed she was editing her thoughts to protect me, to hide larger fears about what was to happen. Gwennie would sacrifice herself for her children even to the point of not revealing her doubts if she thought her children's faith would feel a tremor. I took her comment to mean she was afraid of losing touch not only with her family but also with all this familiar world. It was a fear of losing control.

It was our habit in those final days to pray together. 'Come down Holy Spirit, and bring your peace.' I said it several times, like a mantra, holding her hand.

Gwennie's breathing slowed and her face reflected her calmness. She returned to that coma-like sleep which only those close to the eternal portal are granted.

Mostly when Gwennie spoke to us in those final few days, her eyes remained closed. She floated in the coma, only sometimes, briefly, returning to the world she was leaving. But one day, when I asked what we should pray for, she looked directly at me, and said, 'That I die well.'

Four words, spoken in as firm a voice as she ever had used in all the time I had known her.

Making plain in words what was absolutely plain in her eyes and her tone, Gwennie meant: 'I have children and

especially grandchildren who are seeing me die. I wish to take care of them through this as I have done so before. I do not wish them to see doubt or fear in me. I want to remain a sign of faith for them. They will have hope!'

'That I die well.'

'That I die in faith, for them.'

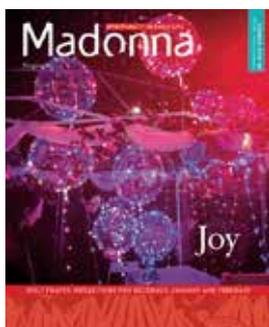
Jesus, in Gethsemane, when He wanted to die, wanted to die well: 'Father...remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done,' (Luke 22: 42) Joyful jars of wedding wine at Cana (John 2: 1-10), first paradoxical hint of the mission ahead, were now turned to 'sweat...like great drops of blood,' (Luke 22:42 – 44). The inevitable had arrived. He had lost control.

In a similar way to Gwennie's concern for her offspring, Jesus didn't want His disciples' faith disturbed, so He went on from them, 'a stone's throw' (Luke 22:41), to pray alone. He knelt (Luke 22:41), and even 'fell with his face to the ground' (Matthew 26:39). His soul was 'sorrowful unto death' (Mark 14:34, Matthew 26: 38), and so He used, to the full, the resource of prayer, regaining equanimity and characteristic compassion when finding His fellows sleeping peacefully alongside His agony: 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' (Matthew 26: 41, Mark 14: 38). Perhaps He was also thinking of Himself, the divine Spirit trembling at the indignity of a mortal end.

'That I die well.'

We never quite know when or where we shall meet the hero or heroine who will save our life. Our very surprise is partly a measure of their heroism. But what is unique to every one of them is how little we see of their agony, how much we see of their strength. They are always a consolation to us, even when secret or quiet prayer has first been needed as a consolation to them.

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