

PRAY Loving God, you call us to care for one another. Help us notice those near us who are sick or hungry or feeling down. Help us hear and respond to your call to be your heart and hands and feet in the world. Amen.

HOSANNA!

NARRATOR: When the great crowd of people coming to Jerusalem for the Passover feast heard Jesus was coming into the city, they took palm branches and went out to meet him.

CROWD: Hosanna. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

NARRATOR: Jesus found a young donkey and rode it, as is written in scripture, "Fear not, daughter Zion. Your king comes sitting on the foal of a donkey."

MEAL

NARRATOR: Jesus sent two disciples ahead to prepare a Passover meal.

As the sun set, Jesus and the Twelve arrived and reclined at the table.

JESUS: One of you is about to betray me.

DISCIPLES: (one by one) Not I.

JESUS: One of you who is dipping in the same dish with me.

NARRATOR: During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples.

JESUS: Take this; this is my body.

NARRATOR: In the same way he took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and all drank from it.

JESUS: This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many. I will never drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

NARRATOR: They sang songs of praise, then walked out to the Mount of Olives.

SPiRIT

IN
THE

Waiting Room →

by Nancy Jo Sullivan

Fifteen years ago I often asked the question, Why does God allow suffering? I had just become a new mother, but my baby daughter was sick, very sick. Not only did she have Down's syndrome but the doctors had discovered a serious heart defect. Six weeks after Sarah's birth she had surgery, and for days my husband and I kept vigil by her bedside in intensive care.

Behind swinging steel doors marked in red letters Sterilized Area, our baby lay in a corner crib. Huddling over her bed, we held her tiny hands and listened to the beat of her heart as thin jagged lines on the monitor above etched her progress. Nurses adjusted her breathing tubes

and changed her bandages while doctors murmured softly and wrote notes on clipboards. They said her prognosis was grim.

Sometimes it was all too much, and I needed to get away from the sterile syringes and the pulsing of electrocardiographs. Each day I slipped down the hall to a lobby lined with chairs. There I turned the pages of outdated magazines or watched talk shows as I chewed on leathery apples from the vending machine.

Other parents sat there, too, parents like us, parents whose children suffered from heart disease or cancer or ailments so rare I had never heard of them.



As I listened to their stories, I wondered how God could allow such disappointment and pain.

Then one day a new face arrived, a tall bearded man holding the hand of his five-year-old son. He wore the distinctive dark clothing of an Orthodox Jew: a tall dark hat with a brim, a long coal-colored coat with tails, and black tapered trousers. Curious, I watched as he placed a shawl and a small black prayer book on his son's lap. Then he looked up and gave me a quick nod in greeting.

His name was Shimon. A rabbi, he had flown in from Boston that morning and would be staying with a nearby Jewish community. His son needed a new kidney. As the days passed, Shimon turned that lobby into a sort of living room. He set a gold-framed picture of his family on a table next to the vending machine. Each day he offered me kosher food from a paper bag: fresh-baked bread, red grapes, seasoned fish. And every morning he put on the shawl and his yarmulke; then with his prayer book opened he recited several Hebrew prayers in a soft voice.

Whenever he prayed I watched something amazing. One by one, each parent turned away from magazines and candy bars and talk shows. Together we bowed our heads. I don't think any of us knew or fully understood his prayers. Most of us had come from Christian traditions, yet each of us felt a certain strength, a quiet comfort as he prayed.

In between those prayers and the breaking of bread, Shimon and I made conversation. We talked of the cold Midwestern winters, the ocean breezes in Boston, our families, and God. He spoke of the great I Am, an



inextinguishable fire that led his people out of darkness, a brilliant flame that blazed in times of uncertainty. He was at peace with God. I, on the other hand, was not.

Then early on Sunday morning, Sarah took a turn for the worse. The doctors discovered a staph infection in her blood. It could take

her life. My husband and I stood vigil by her crib. She lay almost lifeless, her small body bruised from weeks of incisions, needles, and stitches. Like the other children in that ward, she had battled more disease in a few short weeks than most people do in a lifetime.

As I held her tiny ashen hand, I retreated to a dark, despairing place where the light of faith is snuffed out and God's absence seems real. Then I made my way to the lobby and buried my head in my hands.

"Can I help you?" I heard the rabbi ask.

After a long silence, I finally looked up. "Shimon," I asked, "why does God allow such great suffering?"

For a moment Shimon bowed his head. Then he turned to me and said something I will never forget. "I do not know much about the God you hold in your heart," he began, "except that he suffered and died on a cross. Perhaps it is your suffering God who draws near to you now."

As he spoke, images of Calvary began to fill my mind: the somber sky, the nails of iron, the cross itself. In my mind I drew near to that cross. I could feel a

wounded Christ wrap his injured arms around me, my sick baby, my husband, Shimon, and every parent in that lobby. An anguished God aching with the anguish of these children.

Soon a warmth began to fill me. It started out as an ember of hope, then became a blaze of faith. God was present. I knew it. I felt it.

Three days later Sarah recovered from the infection that had threatened her life.

With suitcases packed to leave the hospital, we passed through the lobby one last time. Cradling my baby, I searched for Shimon to say goodbye. He wasn't there. Some of the other parents happily reported that a kidney had been found for Shimon's son, so Shimon would wait close to the operating room all day.

I scrawled a quick thank-you on the back of a candy box and tucked it underneath his family picture.



It's hard to believe that more than a decade has passed. Now Sarah is fifteen years old, and I find myself recalling the rabbi who reminded me of what was at the heart of my own faith. My God does not abandon us in times of suffering. Jesus is there because he has been through suffering himself.



QUESTIONS 1 What seems hardest about watching someone you love suffer? 2 How has God been there for you during suffering times? 3 Why do the chief priests want Jesus crucified? 4 Why is Pilate willing to order Jesus' death? 5 What is Jesus' crime according to the inscription? 6 Who is being crucified in our time?

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Palm/Passion Sunday

Jesus suffers and dies.

GARDEN

JESUS: Your faith in me will be shaken. The scripture says it, "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.

PETER: My faith in you will never be shaken.

JESUS: Tonight before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.

PETER: If I have to die with you, I will not deny you.

DISCIPLES: Count us in, too.

NARRATOR: Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a garden place called Gethsemani.

JESUS: My heart is full of sorrow. Sit here and stay awake. (Goes on and bows to the ground.) Abba, you have power to do all things. Take this cup from me. But let it be according to your will, not mine.

NARRATOR: After he prayed, Jesus found his friends asleep.

JESUS: Peter, you couldn't stay awake for an hour? Pray that you are not put to the test.

NARRATOR: Judas and a crowd with swords and clubs found Jesus. The chief priests and some of the other religious leaders sent them. Judas had arranged to point Jesus out by kissing him.

JUDAS: Teacher. (Kisses, embraces Jesus.)

NARRATOR: The crowd arrested Jesus and led him off to the high priest's house. Jesus' disciples all fled, except Peter who followed at a distance to the high priest's courtyard.

TRIAL

NARRATOR: The chief priests and many leaders who were part of the religious council called the Sanhedrin gathered together to hear witnesses against Jesus.

HIGH PRIEST: Have you an answer to these witnesses?

NARRATOR: Jesus remained silent.

HIGH PRIEST: Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?

JESUS: I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.

HIGH PRIEST: You have heard this blasphemy. What is your verdict?

SANHEDRIN: Guilty.

NARRATOR: Some spit on him. They blindfolded him and hit him, asking him to play the prophet and tell who did it.



Meanwhile in the courtyard outside, a servant girl noticed Peter.

SERVANT: You have been with Jesus of Nazareth.

PETER: I don't know what you are talking about.

NARRATOR: A cock crowed.

SERVANT: (to bystander) That man is one of them.

PETER: No, I am not.

BYSTANDER: You are, too, one of them. You're from Galilee, aren't you?

PETER: I don't even know the man you are talking about.

NARRATOR: At that moment a cock crowed a second time. Peter heard it, remembered Jesus' prediction, and began to weep.

PILATE

NARRATOR: At daybreak, the Sanhedrin bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the chief Roman official in Israel.

PILATE: Are you the king of the Jews?

JESUS: You are the one who is saying it.

NARRATOR: The chief priests accused him of plots against the government.

PILATE: Surely you have an answer to these accusations.

NARRATOR: Jesus made no further answer. Pilate wanted to honor the custom of releasing a prisoner on the Passover feast. He spoke to the crowd.

PILATE: Do you want me to release the king of the Jews?

CROWD: We want Barabbas.

PILATE: What shall I do with the king of the Jews?

CROWD: Crucify him.

NARRATOR: Pilate released the rebel Barabbas and ordered Jesus to be scourged and crucified. Roman soldiers took him inside their fortress, dressed him in purple, wove a crown of thorns, and put it on him.

SOLDIERS: Hail, king of the Jews.

NARRATOR: They hit his head with reeds, spit at him, and genuflected before him. When they finished mocking him, they led him away to crucify him.

CROSS

NARRATOR: The soldiers made a man named Simon from Cyrene in Africa carry Jesus' cross. They walked Jesus outside the city to the hill called Golgotha. They offered him drugged wine but he refused. They crucified him and rolled dice for his garments. The inscription proclaiming his offense read: "The King of the Jews." They crucified two rebels, one on either side of him. It was about nine in the morning.

PEOPLE: Save yourself by coming down from that cross.

CHIEF PRIESTS: He saved others but he cannot save himself.

SCRIBES: Let the Messiah and King of Israel come down from that cross, so that we can see it and believe in him.

JESUS: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

BYSTANDERS: He's calling Elijah. Let's see if Elijah comes and takes him down.

What does Holy Week celebrate?

NARRATOR: Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the temple tore from top to bottom.

CENTURION: Surely this man was the Son of God.

NARRATOR: Many women watched at a distance. Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joseph, and Salome were among them. They had followed Jesus from Galilee and served him.

NARRATOR: Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, who believed in Jesus, asked Pilate for his body and buried him before the sun set and Sabbath began. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where he had been laid.

TOMB

NARRATOR: Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought sweet-smelling oil to anoint Jesus. Very early in the morning on the day after Sabbath, they went to the tomb.

MARY: Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?

NARRATOR: When they arrived, the huge stone had been rolled back. They entered the tomb and saw a young man sitting at the right dressed in a white robe. They were startled.

YOUNG MAN: Don't be afraid. You are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified. He has been raised up; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. Go tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see him just as he told you."

NARRATOR: The women hurried out and fled from the tomb. They were beside themselves and trembling. They told no one anything, for they were afraid.

Mark 14.1-16.8

Palm/Passion Sunday,

which we celebrate today, begins Holy Week. Palms are its symbol, the leafy branches citizens of Jerusalem broke off trees and waved to welcome Jesus into their city. In its liturgy for Sunday the Church juxtaposes the reading of this peaceful gospel with the passion story. We bless palms and celebrate Jesus'

entry into Jerusalem to begin Mass. We read the story of Jesus' suffering, humiliation, and death as the main gospel of the day. From earliest times Christians remembered Jesus' last days by visiting the sites and remembering the happenings at them.

Our Holy Week liturgies today journey with Jesus through the last events of his life—his last supper with his friends, his passion, death, and resurrection. In worship, the word *celebrate* means *to remember and make present in story, actions, and symbols*.

Holy Thursday celebrates Jesus' last meeting with his friends when they ate together and he washed everyone's feet.

The Church remembers how Jesus washed his friends' feet by having the priest wash people's feet during the liturgy or sometimes having the people of the parish wash one another's hands or feet.

Holy Thursday liturgy also remembers that Jesus broke bread, blessed it and gave it to his friends and poured a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to his friends, asking them to do the same to remember him. Each Eucharist continues this action.



Good Friday remembers Jesus' passion and death. The Church strips the altar bare and does not celebrate Eucharist on this day. Catholics gather to pray for the needs of the Church and of the people of the world for whom Jesus died. The cross is the central symbol; we kiss the cross or show it reverence in the liturgy.

Holy Saturday is the holiest day of the year. It is the night of Jesus' resurrection. Light and water are its symbols. The community gathers in darkness to light the Easter candle, symbolizing Jesus' resurrection. By the light of the candle we read stories of God's goodness in creating the world, leading Israel out of Egypt, and raising Jesus from the dead. We bless water and baptize new Christians, who believe Jesus will lead them from death to life. We sprinkle the congregation with the same water.

Easter Sunday celebrates Jesus' resurrection and the new life it promises all who follow him. All the spring signs of new life symbolize Easter.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Use the passion gospel in this issue to create your own Holy Week prayer service. Read sections in different places. Prepare symbols for at least some sections; for example, break and share bread (after MEAL section); make small crosses from twigs tied with yarn to give your group for taking home (passion); give everyone flowers (Easter).
- 2 Celebrate your own contemporary stations of the cross by visiting places where people in your community are suffering; for example, a rest home, a battered women's shelter, a homeless shelter for families, a hospital, a burnt-out house.
- 3 Keep a diary of how your parish celebrates Holy Week. Attend the service for each day. Write about your experience of special parts of each liturgy you attend.