

## THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS IN MATTHEW'S GETHSEMANE NARRATIVE (26:36-46) – Timothy Mejida

I want to start by thanking Blazej for inviting me to your programme. I am also grateful to him, the dean and the entire publishing group of the Commenius University Press for publishing my 2021 doctoral thesis titled, *Obedient in Gethsemane*. My appreciation again goes to the Cleopas group for partly funding that publication. I had always nursed the idea of coming to see you in person someday. So I thank God for this opportunity, and Blazej, for making it possible as it is.

### Introduction

In this presentation, I am building on my thesis, *Obedient in Gethsemane*. We are going to look at some special features of the suffering Jesus encounters in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46). It is nothing new to Christians or to Bible reading people to talk about Jesus' sufferings throughout his life. Every Christian readily knows about this when they read or hear the story of Gethsemane. However, it is good that we still talk about it. Because the more we read that story the more we discover that there is a lot to learn. We cannot finish talking about the sufferings of Jesus. Also, the way he accepts and handles this suffering can be mind-blowing and educative.

We are following the story as Matthew the evangelist wrote it. But we will also include some few points from Mark's story of Gethsemane. This will help us to understand more the nature and extent of Jesus' suffering. Moreover, since we have started the Church's Year B calendar, Matthew may have some different ideas which will help to make us understand and appreciate Mark's story better.

Suffering is not accidental or strange in the life of Jesus. The life and work of saving his people from their sins necessarily result in suffering (Luke 24:26; Acts 26:23).<sup>1</sup> His last suffering leading up to his death is what we call his Passion. Jesus himself predicted it three times way back before now (Matt 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Many people will agree that "Facing the end of life brings unavoidable suffering" involving the body, mind, spirit, interaction with other people, and even questions about the meaning of life.<sup>2</sup>

### Jesus Comes to Gethsemane

It is the same with Jesus. When Jesus comes near to the end of his life, he starts preparing himself and his disciples. Jesus is the type of person who wants to put his record straight and have his people near him when he is dying. He eats the Passover meal and the Last Supper with them. Then he brings them with him to the Mount of Olives (26:30; Mark 14:26) and specifically to his prayer 'closet,' Gethsemane. So, this evening we make attempt to follow Jesus with his disciples into this place.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Rishell, "Suffering," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. James Hastings; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 2:681.

<sup>2</sup> Marcia Lattanzi-Licht, 'Religion, Spirituality, and Dying,' in *Handbook of Thanatology: The Essential Body of Knowledge for the Study of Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, ed. David K. Meagher and David E. Balk (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 12-13.

By the way, Gethsemane (Greek word derived from Aramaic) means 'oil press.' This might be the place where the olive fruits on the Mount of Olives are hard-pressed to produce oil. It tells us that Jesus might be under pressure here. The pressure might ultimately bring about blessing; just as olives are crushed to produce oil for the good of people.

Matthew 26:36 says, "Then *Jesus* comes *with them* to a place called Gethsemane." In order for us to more clearly understand what is going on here, it will be good to take our minds back to the beginning of the Gospel. In Matthew 1:21 the name Jesus is explained to mean that 'he will save his people from their sins.' In verse 23 we are told that "they shall call him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'" The name, 'Jesus,' and the preposition, 'with,' is used here together. This make us think that Jesus (Saviour) as Emmanuel (God-with-us) comes to Gethsemane to save his people from their sins.

In Gethsemane he will save his people through his suffering in exchange/atonement. We say 'in exchange' because sinners are expected to suffer the consequences of their sins while the righteous are to go unpunished (Matt 13:40-43; 25:46). However, here, Jesus who is righteous and, therefore, is not supposed to be punished will be the one to bear it all. This idea will guide us in the way we understand the suffering he faces in Gethsemane.

Just near the entrance Jesus tells all the disciples "Sit here while I go over there and pray." To pray is to relate with God. Every prayer has an intention: thanksgiving, supplication, etc. We do not know Jesus' intention now. But when a master says this, it serves as an invitation for the disciples to pray also. If righteous Jesus prays, then we must even pray more. Questions: Do we carve out time to pray like Jesus? Our prayer life can also encourage others around us to pray. Like Jesus, let us encourage other people close to us to pray. Exercise: Pray genuinely and deeply with somebody this month.

### Jesus experiences Grief and Fear

Jesus takes *with him* Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) further into the place. Now, some of us are either with the disciples sitting at the entrance or with these three disciples. But it is best to follow Jesus throughout. Anyway, while Jesus is with these three disciples he begins to show signs of a person who senses danger around the corner. But at this stage only he knows what it is. Suddenly, he begins to be sorrowful (*λυπεῖσθαι*) and troubled or upset (*ἀδημονεῖν*) (Matt 26:37). We could say he is nearly depressed.<sup>3</sup> However, also we will realise soon that there is more going on inside of Jesus than what we and the disciples know for now. In Mark's Gospel Jesus is even described as being alarmed, shocked or panicky (*εκθαμβεῖσθαι*) and very upset (*ἀδημονεῖν*) (Mark 14:33). Never before in his life has he felt these two emotions. Here we know that our Master suspects that something bad is about to happen. But what it is we do not know for sure yet.

Often, in the company of special or close associates, our emotions come to the surface. This is happening to Jesus now. Their nearness also helps Jesus in the letting out of emotional distress.

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<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 395.

### He Confides in his Close Associates

The emotion he is experiencing is brought closer to us when we hear it again now directly from the lips of Jesus. He gives them secret information when he tells them his feelings saying, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt 26:38a). The disciples at the entrance do not hear this. It is not always that a leader/master shows and tells his subjects about his weakness and fears. And to make matters worse, his sorrow that started moments ago is already "extreme" and cannot be reduced until his death.<sup>4</sup>

Somehow, he has earlier faced sorrows or struggles of soul.<sup>5</sup> But this sorrow seems to be unprecedented in his life. He experiences something that God's chosen people in the Old Testament experienced. For example, David's soul sometimes used to be 'very sorrowful' (περίλυπος, Ps 42:6). Again, being sorrowful 'unto death,' recalls similar situations experienced by many Old Testament personalities sent by God. Moses, Elijah, and Jonah, expressed it in their prayers (cf. Num 11:14-15; 1 Kgs 19:4; Jonah 4:9).<sup>6</sup> But the combination of 'very sorrowful' and 'unto death' is rare. Sirach 37:2 describes the betrayal by a friend as being a sorrow that comes near to death. Even so, the detail regarding Jesus' distress even goes deeper than what he tells his human confidants as we shall see soon. We may know that Jesus has been plunged into deep sorrow. But however much he explains himself to others, the true weight of the suffering is borne by him alone. In life, no one can ever truly and completely experience another person's distress as if it were his/her very own.<sup>7</sup>

### In Suffering he Watches

After confiding in them he tells them, "remain here and watch with me" (26:38b). This means that he is carefully watching. He knows death is near. So companionship and solidarity are of great help to him. To stay awake whether physically or spiritually demands conscious effort and sacrifice. Jesus does both of these in his Gethsemane prayerful vigil.

He is alert so that he may know the hour of his physical Passion. He is doing what he told them before to do. During his recent ministry in Jerusalem he told his disciples about the need to watch always because no one knows the day and hour of the Lord's coming (Matt 24:36-51; 25:1-30). Jesus has never been in need of help from anyone. But now he needs it. So this is a very difficult time for the Lord Jesus Christ. That being said, in Mark he does not add "with me" but simply tells them to watch (Mark 14:37).

### In suffering he Prays

After saying that, he distances himself from all the disciples to pray; to have a tête-à-tête with God. His relationship with God is special. He bares his whole heart confidentially to God who

<sup>4</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 153.

<sup>5</sup> See Alfred E. Garvie, "Struggles of Soul," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. James Hastings; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 2:681 (e.g. when he is moved with indignation [Matt 9:30], when, connected with compassion, he heals or is hindered to heal [13:58], when he strove to dissuade Judas from betraying him [17:22], his prior prayers "were probably strenuous efforts to discover and to submit to the Father's will" [11:25-26; 14:23].).

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, "General Audience," Paul VI Hall, Wednesday, 1 February 2012, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Cassell, "Recognizing Suffering," *Hastings Center Report*, 21 no. 3 (May-June 1991): 24-31 here 24.

is his confidant par excellence. This is what is called an intimate or gut-level communication. His solitary prayer reminds us of his teaching on praying in secret (6:6).

Jesus falls down 'on his face' while praying (26:39). It reminds us of how people like Abraham (Gen 17:3, 17), Moses (Num 16:4), and the community of Israel (1 Kgs 18:39) fell down on their faces. By that they were expressing worship, supplication, obedience and total surrender to God whom they completely trusted. Mark's Gospel states that Jesus "was falling" (ἐπιπτεν) on the earth (Mark 14:35). That imperfect tense, "was falling" is more moving because it pictures him as falling repeatedly and uncontrollably too. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus appears to be suffering more unbearably. Again, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus simply prayed (the aorist προσήξατο, 'he prayed,' 26:42, 44). But in Mark's Gospel, he prayed repeatedly (the 'imperfect' προσήχετο, 'he was praying,' Mark 14:35); desperately imploring God.<sup>8</sup> In Mark's Gospel, Jesus, as always, appears weaker and suffering more than that in Matthew's Gospel.

We can summarise here that as Jesus finds himself in this tragedy of death being around the corner, he does four things: (i) he confides in his closest disciples about his weakness. (ii) He appropriates Scripture to himself. (iii) He still asks for the support of his disciples although he knows that they will all abandon him. (iv) He goes aside to watch and pray in solitude and quiet. We learn from him how to handle our difficult moments. Two most important things he does in grief are watching and praying.

### Jesus' First Prayer:

Jesus prays with humility to God whom he calls 'My Father.' With the softest approach he humbly says, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.' The cup he always knew that he would drink (20:22-23; 26:27-28) is now very close to him ('this,' not 'that' cup) and he fears. So, now, we can understand the reason for his sorrow. In Mark's Gospel Jesus' prayer appears to have two petitions. He first also prays most humbly that the hour of the Passion may pass (Mark 14:35). Then, he prays with a more forceful order telling God in the second person domineering way, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me" (Mark 14:36). It is as if he cannot stand the horror he sees in the cup. Therefore, the Son dares to command his Father directly and emphatically. However, the "hour" and the "cup" may mean the same thing.

In any case, this prayer of possibility is not abnormal. The Bible tells us that sometimes God can change his mind. It has happened before; in the life of Abraham (Gen 18:32-33); Moses (Exod 32:10-14); and the Ninevites (Jonah 3:10). But when we make God change his mind because of our fear and weakness, it means that we have lowered for ourselves the power of the suffering which is God's perfect will for us (cf. 19:1-8). [Every suffering produces its own result.]

In the Old Testament, this cup he talks about here represents the just punishment from God. For example, Psalm 75:8 (NRSVCE) says, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup...and all

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Pope, "Emotions, Pre-emotions, and Jesus' Comportment in Luke 22:39-42," *NovT* 62 (2020): 25-43 here 36.

the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.” Through his incarnation Jesus has fully identified with sinful humanity such that he feels our “sin as if it were His very own.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, he the righteous one (Matt 3:15; 27:19, 24) is now the sin bearer (Rom 4:25). Beyond that, “He is now *made sin* for us” (2 Cor 5:21). He is experiencing the consequences of sin in place of the entire humanity (cf. Luke 23:40-41).<sup>10</sup> And he trembles at God’s righteous judgment upon sin and sinners. This is the necessary evil involved in his sacrifice for us. Maybe as Jesus sees this in his mind, he is also horrified at how humanity is repaying with God’s goodness and offer of salvation with unspeakable evil by killing God’s messenger.<sup>11</sup>

The hope for the possibility that the cup could be removed derives from fear and weakness and is based on the idea that, sometimes, God through his permissive will, can/does change his mind (Gen 18:32-33; Exod 32:10-14; Jonah 3:10). But when we make God change his mind as a result of our fear and weakness, it means that we have lowered for ourselves the scale and intensity of the suffering which is his perfect will for us (cf. 19:1-8).

### *The Theme of Conflict*

Jesus is experiencing an internal conflict and he fears. He has always chosen to work for God. But now his human will (desire to live or save his body) clashes with God’s will (or call for him to die and thereby save his soul).<sup>12</sup> And he wants to withdraw from suffering. Not many people survive this level of torture and struggles. Yet God does not give him any clear answer. So he is struggling within himself to choose between what is easy and what is right. As he finds himself in this difficult situation, he prays asking to be delivered from having to go through it. However, the Son of God must drink this cup. If not he cannot save his people from sin and its consequences. His suffering brings salvation.

Again, since he comes to save his people from their sins, we know that the devil is in the background (cf. Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; 22:31). Jesus is therefore struggling also with Satan. He is in conflict with God and he is in conflict with the devil. Furthermore, there is an overhanging struggle between God and Satan over Jesus who is pulled in opposite directions. Jesus’ choice determines who wins the battle. However, he decides to save his soul in agreement with his teaching, “What does it profit a human being to gain the whole world and lose his soul...?” (Matt 16:26). He relies on God and, therefore, the salvation of his soul will also produce the salvation of sinners.

Therefore, Jesus quickly tells God, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you [will]” (Matt 26:39). So Jesus submits to God’s will. Human beings want to be in control of their lives. Surrendering into another person’s control or even into God’s hand is taking a risk. But Jesus surrenders himself into God’s difficult plan for his life.

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred E. Garvie, “Agony,” in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. James Hastings; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), 1:38.

<sup>10</sup> Or curse, cf. Gal 3:13.

<sup>11</sup> Garvie, “Agony,” 37-38.

<sup>12</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 395; St Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, vol. 2, *The Breviloquium*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1963), 169.

He is prepared to drink the cup; to save his soul rather than save his flesh (16:25-26); to save sinners who definitely cannot save themselves or pacify God's anger. Jesus will bear the necessary consequence of the decision he has made freely to embrace God's perfect will. And this includes how God turns his face completely away from sin.

Hebrews 5:7 refers to this Gethsemane struggles and how Jesus overcomes, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." The Church acknowledges the work of Jesus when she says that the suffering and death of Jesus broke the power of Satan over humanity and brought life to the whole world.<sup>13</sup>

### **Jesus' First Return to his Disciples:**

He returns to the three disciples and finds them all sleeping instead of watching with him. Their sleeping shows that they are not with him. Jesus rebukes them for this and again exhorts them to watch and pray for themselves, so that they do not come into temptation. He knows that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matt 26:40-41; Mark 14:38). In Mark's Gospel, Jesus does not tell them to watch with him (14:34) and he also only rebukes them for not watching at all (14:37).

### ***The Theme of Temptation***

We can understand from Jesus' instruction to his disciples that he himself is already experiencing temptation.<sup>14</sup> He is tempted not to drink the cup. There is conflict between his spirit and his flesh. But because he is watching and praying he does not fall into temptation. The devil will not succeed in pulling him away from God's plan for him. Seemingly, if Jesus himself sins then he will lack the credential to save his people from their sins.

### **Jesus' Second Prayer:**

He goes back to prayer because he loves God and humanity which he came to save. He seems to know now that the cup will not pass away. But now he even makes a more dogged effort to submit unconditionally to God's will. He says, "My Father, if it is not possible for this [cup] to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (26:42). This was exactly how he taught his disciples to pray in the Our Father (26:42; cf. 6:10). He practices what he teaches; unlike many people, then and today, who do not practice what they teach (Matt 23:1-4). We can say that Jesus makes another step toward perfection in his spiritual progress. Maximus the Confessor says that the human will fully expresses itself only when it chooses to freely unite itself to the divine will.<sup>15</sup> In Mark's Gospel, Jesus does not allude to the Our Father prayer. In fact, he is still unwilling to drink the cup as at the first prayer (cf. Mark 14:39). As you can see, his second prayer is exactly the same as the first.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Preface of the Passion of the Lord I at Mass.

<sup>14</sup> See Garvie, "Agony," 36. For James N. Neumann, "Thy Will Be Done: Jesus's Passion in the Lord's Prayer," *JBL* 138, no. 1 (2019): 181, Jesus struggles not to enter into the great πειρασμός (temptation) but with his acceptance of the cup enters it.

<sup>15</sup> See Ian A. McFarland, "'Naturally and by grace': Maximus the Confessor on the operation of the will," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (2005): 410-433 (here 414, 425-427, 431-433); Benedict XVI, "Wednesday Audience," 3.

### Jesus' Second Return to His Disciples:

When he goes back to the three disciples he meets them sleeping again (26:43; cp. Mark 14:40). To make matters worse, Jesus now clearly bears two levels of temptation. He is bearing his own which is increasing as he gets no answer from God. The fact that the disciples are not helping him makes it worse. Moreover, he is also struggling not to let his disciples enter into temptation as they cannot even help themselves. This makes it tougher as he now struggles both for himself and for them.<sup>16</sup> In addition, he gets comfort neither from God nor from his disciples. He bears humanity's burden all alone.

### Jesus' Third Prayer:

He goes back straight for his third prayer. Now, Matthew's Jesus has reached a level ground in his struggle for the acceptance of God's will. He is sure now that the cup cannot pass. So, he repeats his second prayer verbatim, "My Father, if it is not possible for this [cup] to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (26:44). In Mark's Gospel, we can only suppose that Jesus still repeats his first prayer even at this point. Therefore, we can say that his human will resists drinking the cup to the last.

### Jesus' Third Return to His Disciples

He comes back to his disciples and finds them sleeping. He may still be hopeful that God will support him. However, for now, he feels that both God and his disciples are 'distant.' His soul is still sorrowful; and maybe even more sorrowful now than at the beginning (cf. Matt 26:38). But he is not giving up. The hour to drink the cup (i.e., Passion and death) is near and he will still do what God wants. The action of watching and praying has strengthened him to meet his arresters; and face the physical suffering of his coming Passion and death. So, he gives his disciples courage also to 'rise' and go with him (Matt 26:45-46; Mark 14:41-42) to meet the future challenges. In obeying God, they should not be afraid of what people will do to them. They should not fear those that can kill the body but cannot kill the soul (Matt 10:28).

### *The Theme of Abandonment:*

Abandonment is another theme related to suffering. Jesus brings all the problems of his life into Gethsemane. But we now want to talk more on the area of his feeling abandoned:

(i) *He Experiences Abandonment by the People:* Throughout his ministry, he has been abandoned by his people whom he came to save. He knows that right now the religious authorities and others are in the city making plans on how to kill him (26:2). They will soon come to arrest him (26:45) while he is praying and suffering for their salvation. Later he will be rejected by the whole (house) of Israel (Matt 26:57- 27:26; Mark 15:6-15). After that they will kill him as a deceiver of people. They do not believe that he is the Son of God, the Messiah.

(ii) *He Experiences Abandonment by His Disciples:* If he is abandoned by the people, at least, he has his disciples around him. They will continue his mission in the world after he is gone. But by sleeping here instead of watching and praying, they too abandon him. Now, he feels he

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<sup>16</sup> Sung Uk Lim, "The Emotive Semantics of Asian Context: What Does Jesus' Sorrow in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46) Signify for a Korean Pastor's Kid?" in *Matthew* (eds. Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James P. Grimshaw; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 122.

is in addition abandoned by his own very disciples. This must increase his suffering. He knows that one of his disciples, Judas, will betray him (Matt 26:20-25, 45-49; Mark 14:17-21, 42). He knows that at his arrest all his disciples will desert him (26:31, 56; Mark 14:27, 50). He also knows that ultimately, Peter the model disciple, will deny him totally (26:34, 69-74; Mark 14:30, 66-72). He feels the pains of all of these.

(iii) *He Experiences Abandonment by God*: Jesus has been rejected by the whole of Israel. He has been abandoned by his disciples. Nevertheless, he has God whom he has served so devotedly to inaugurate his kingdom on earth and to save his people from their sins. But this is the worst of the problems. He feels most abandoned by God in the heat of suffering. He has prayed three times and God has been completely silent and seems to be doing nothing concerning this problem.

Soon he will be judged and condemned by sinners. They will nail him on the cross. He will feel extreme pain, shame and mockery from people. His disciples are nowhere to be found. The sorrow of his soul is getting really extreme and full. The Godless people are doing their evil to him. He searches for God and does not find Him. He is struggling with the dark side of God. He seems not to understand God's attitude toward him. So, he cries out with a loud voice: "Ἡλὶ, ἡλὶ, λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι?" ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' [cf. 27:46]). (This is an aside [on a lower degree]: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar was shocked to the marrow at seeing his best friend, he would never have suspected, come to stab him. This made him say, 'Et tu, Brute?' ('And you, Brutus?')). Now, Jesus does not even dare to call God 'My Father' but 'My God.'<sup>17</sup> Everyone that he needs seems to abandon him as he hangs between heaven and earth.

Although as God's Son he is the closest human being to God, now he feels he is the farthest person from God. This is because he takes the place of sinners and has even become 'sin' itself. God and sin cannot dwell together. He does not feel the presence of God although God is with him supporting him in his great sacrifice, which will bring God and humanity back together. It is so amazing that it is at the time that he feels this complete alienation from God that he achieves the perfect reconciliation between God and humanity.<sup>18</sup> Pope Benedict XVI captures it succinctly when he says that throughout the 'hour' of the Passion Jesus "is experiencing his last profound loneliness precisely while God's plan is being brought about."<sup>19</sup> We may say that the only companion who has not abandoned Jesus throughout is the most unwanted one—the devil.

But as Jesus breathes his last and dies, the sacrifice is completed. He has saved his people from their sins and has conquered the devil. The devil can do no more to his body or his soul. Also, his death frees not only his soul. It also frees our (or sinners') souls from sorrow. Now and forever, anyone who comes to Jesus is saved and with Jesus conquers the devil.

## Conclusion

Indeed, suffering can be a very terrible experience. Doubtlessly, when we human beings suffer we can also feel abandoned by friends, close associates, family, and even God. But the reality is that we are never alone. God is with us. Again, we learn from Jesus how to handle it. We too

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Psalm 22:1.

<sup>18</sup> Collin Miller Smith, "Cult books revisited: Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*," *Theology* 121, no. 5 (2018): 357-363, here 361.

<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, "General Audience," 2.



should try to keep vigil in prayer like himself, especially when the going is tough. Our occasional vigil could be through the night or day or days of Novena prayers. But as he said in Matt 24:36-44, "Stay awake (spiritually) at all times; because you do not know the day or the hour your Lord is coming." When we join our sufferings to the sufferings of Jesus, our sufferings too will become, to some degree, redemptive sufferings.

However, we should never be afraid. Jesus himself is always with his disciples (Matt 18:20) even until the end of time (28:20). Therefore, Jesus is with us even now and is saving us. Jesus who felt abandoned on the cross understands what we pass through (Heb 4:15-16). Only he can meaningfully help us in our pains and suffering when we feel abandoned as sinners.<sup>20</sup> He lets us know that because of our sins we feel the absence of God. But God is actually with us helping us.

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<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," *Theology Today* 31, no. 1 (1974): 6-20.