



GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday in Peru

What is it that we celebrate or remember on Good Friday? Where do we put the emphasis? The name invites images of the physical suffering of Jesus in the hours leading to his death, the emotional pain of mockery, betrayal and feeling abandoned. And it's a day when we remember the ultimate sacrifice, the giving of one's life for others; the fidelity of one man to his belief in and his actions in favour of justice, equality, dignity and the relief of suffering, all of which led to his death. We remember and celebrate his love.

Often over the years I have longed for more time for personal reflection on Good Friday even as I willingly participated in and was nourished by the liturgy. But I wanted something different, the sense of being one with Jesus that I felt I needed solitude to achieve.

In Lima I found the Good Friday Stations of the Cross much longer and more colourful than I was accustomed to. We walked with an initial small group of parishioners along a busy street with the youth of the parish dressed as soldiers, crying women, and Jesus with a life size cross and accompanied by a loudspeaker on a cart. The youth dramatised the Stations along the way; we felt the anguish of his mother as she watched him fall. This section, along a busy bus route, provided a startling testimony for passersby. After climbing a narrow stairway up a steep hill to a small settlement on the ridge we scrambled further uphill over rocks and loose

dirt to reach the place of crucifixion. I remember a sense of accompanying Jesus on his journey, and tiredness while standing for the whole of the liturgical ceremonies afterwards.

In my current huge parish, small groups leave from each chapel, sometimes dramatizing, always singing and praying the stations in front of homes where the family provides a simple altar and often something to drink. Each group then congregates at three or four designated chapels for the Good Friday liturgy.

These journeys, walking alongside one person and then finding myself with others, have challenged my desire to spend more time in solitude on this holy day. What I first found strange, walking along talking and singing, at times jostling for a position to see the enactment, is now natural. I've learnt that this day isn't about God and me, it's about us, about community. The walk itself is prayer and needs to be done together.

Some parishioners travel to their place of family origin in the provinces where the whole of Holy Week is a grand religious fiesta. On Good Friday some areas have a three-hour sermon based on the last words of Jesus. There are processions carrying statues, often walking across elaborate carpets of flowers. Others have a meal of 7 different courses with extended family and neighbours. Whatever the form of celebrating Good Friday, the emphasis seems to be on community and commemorating God's great love.

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