

Fourth Mystery: The Carrying of the Cross

PRAYER:

Christ, when you carried the wood to which you would be nailed, it was a long walk no one else could make. Beaten, exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, you trudged along, each step heavy with fatigue. In the heat and dust, your destination seemed to waver, its location uncertain. Weakened, you must have been tempted to give up and let them kill you where you dropped. When Simon of Cyrene was called upon to help you, your burden was lessened, but that only allowed the torturous walk to go on; it was a bittersweet assist.

Job loss is like that: reserves are depleted that may never be rebuilt; having to accept help, when one hates being needy, is bitter. May we accept this cross to bear — with your help — in humble dignity. Amen.

MEDITATION:

Humility is a scorned virtue — a cultivated garden our society disdains. Humility is misunderstood as weakness when, in fact, is it the strong foundation upon which dignity and blessings are built. The Messiah washed the feet of his own disciples; he accepted unjust abuse when he could have unleashed retribution. His eventual victory began with acquiescence, with a willingness to become the most vulnerable of all creatures, a human infant. Humility, embraced with dignity, gives us a change in perspective; it brings gratitude, without which there is no room for even the smallest of joys to penetrate, the merest first step of healing to begin.



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Fifth Mystery: The Crucifixion

PRAYER:

Jesus, remembering your death is not an immediate source of hope. You died! Planted amid jeering onlookers, gamblers, and weeping women, all of your energy spent, you died. That seems helplessly bleak.



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But, because you always invite us to, we look more intently, and we learn; we comprehend that our every human feeling — betrayal, abandonment, shame, exposure, vulnerability — all of our experiences throughout this ordeal,

have been nailed with you to the cross. You, too, were terrified and anxious; you, too, were left to the mercies of weak authority, indifferent bureaucrats, and bullies. You, too, groaned under the weight of your trouble; you experienced familial grief; you were stripped and humiliated.

In your crucifixion, you are with us; may we join our suffering to yours — dying to vanity, to fear, to doubt, to our own narrow demands — so that through you, with you, in you, we may yet rise again. Amen.

MEDITATION:

Dying to self, to one's own plans, to a worldly ambition, takes great trust. Trust now. Laying our crosses upon the cross of Christ, emptying our hands, let us allow our shaken hearts to pour out before him. Let us be emptied, so that we may receive what Christ has in store. In this sort of death, there is only consummation, and therefore a promise of future glory: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11). From Christ's death on that awful Friday came, finally, the sweetest of Sundays.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, help us to remember that a thousand ages in your sight are as an evening past — no more than a "watch in the night" (Ps 90:4). Days begin and days end, and no situation goes on forever. Help us to endure hardships in the trust that these difficult days, too, will pass. In you we find infinite understanding, infinite consolation, infinite hope. Your angels say, "Be not afraid." Help us to remember that your time of trial ended with the tearing of the Temple veil and the rolling back of the stone; our time of trial, too, will end in hope.

Through you, with you, in you, there is nothing to be afraid of. Amen.

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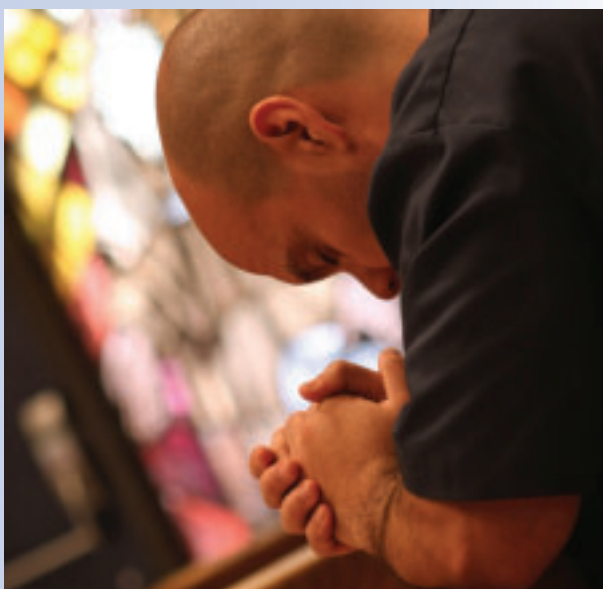
An Intercession on
Behalf of the Jobless
and Underemployed

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Prayer has power. Whether we pray for ourselves or intercede on behalf of another, prayer helps hold together what seems in danger of breaking down in our society, our families, our spirits, and ourselves.

These are frightening times; any one of us can suddenly find ourselves out of work, or unable to meet bills and obligations because a family member's paycheck has vanished. When we are overwhelmed by loss, displacement, anxiety, and very real fear, prayer brings us back in balance.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary provide especially potent meditations by which we may recognize and express our deepest needs and fears. Placed in the company of Jesus and the perspective of his Passion, we find strength in our shared distress, which is never without meaning. Whether personally unemployed, or touched by the plight of someone else who is going through the difficulties of seeking employment, we are able to identify with Christ and join these sufferings to his.



AGNUS IMAGES

First Mystery: The Agony in the Garden

PRAYER:

Lord, being unemployed leaves us feeling stranded and abandoned. Surrounded by well-wishers, we may still have a sense of isolation. Friends who had pledged support seem to fall away, but even when they remain, they — like the apostles — cannot know precisely the depths of despair into which this jobless season has plunged even the most stouthearted.

We walk a new, frightening road not of our choosing, and yet giving in to fear cannot help. As you said to a mother who feared for her child's life, "Do not fear, only believe" (Mk 5:36). You, Christ, fully understand how we vacillate between trust and heart-gripping anxiety; between "let this cup pass from me" and "Thy will be done." Help us to move out of fear into belief and trust. Amen.

MEDITATION:

Ponder Jesus' desolation and fear; see the fullness of his humanity revealed in this moment of intense communion in prayer with his Father. But in the face of this fear, his human will — united to the will of his Father — says "yes." Although you, or someone you know, may be frightened now as never before, this fear can be brought to Christ. He has been this frightened. He is the knowing companion who understands, before a word is spoken.



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Second Mystery: The Scourging

PRAYER:

When Pilate ordered your unjust scourging, he was the authority figure who had no answers; to him, you seemed like the minor character in a larger drama of governance, bureaucracy, and political expediency. From his perspective, your fate was tied to the *Zeitgeist* and your public humiliation a mere by-product. Your trials were "nothing personal," as the saying goes — "just business."

In job losses that emphasize how dispensable one is, as a "small cog" in a big wheel, we endure a similar public humiliation. Reminders of unpaid bills and unmet needs bring doubt and despair that tear into the spirit as deeply as the Romans' terrible instruments tore into your flesh. Whether we endure these ourselves, or watch silently as others endure them, help us to bear the pain of humiliation with your strength. Amen.

MEDITATION:

The scourging of Christ was public knowledge; the crowd understood that Jesus was undergoing torture. The people who loved him were powerless to change anything for him; even Mary had to stand at a distance during Jesus' ordeal, suffering for him. Informing others of a job loss or applying for assistance are painful exposures. These can be moments of exquisite interior agony that feel like bleeding in public. But even if we feel unlovable right now, in our tension and anxiety, we must trust in the love that lives beyond all barriers, flows through all distance, and even pierces time.



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Third Mystery: The Crowning with Thorns

PRAYER:

Jesus, we know that all crowns have metaphorical thorns, but upon your head was placed a crown of mockery, meant to further debase you in the cruel manner of bullies. With joblessness, the mockery is an interior jeering and snarling at the self. In seeking out jobs that do not exist, or struggling to be noticed, our ego takes a beating; our confidence is shaken. Skills, knowledge, expertise — the means by which we define ourselves or are defined by others — are suddenly unremarkable in crowded job markets. That indifference scalds; it forces us to acknowledge pride — that we build our lives around what we do, rather than who we are. Without a job, faced with less doing and more being, we find the stranger of the self; a false monarch in castles built of sand.

But we are more than our resumes; *we were loved into being*. May we renew our strength in you; with your loving guidance, we can see what we each were born to *be*, and pursue that in you, for whom there are no strangers. Amen.

MEDITATION:

Confidence and pride, ego and attitude all manifest themselves in how we present ourselves to the world, and how we understand ourselves in response to lifelong feedback. A painful stripping off of these protective layers reveals our shared vulnerability. No matter how successful one is in the eyes of the world, or how humble, when stripped of our self-trappings, we are each alike in our need to be loved, protected, and valued. Pope Benedict XVI has written, "If an individual is to accept himself, someone must say to him: 'It is good that you exist' — must say it, not with words, but with that act of the entire being that we call love." A prolonged experience of unemployment can make one feel unloved and irrelevant. But it is good that we exist. Others believe this. Christ knows this. All are meant to know it.



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