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SAVE ME FROM THIS HOUR

"Save me from this hour." How often we mortal creatures call out with a plea for relief. What is happening is too much for me to endure. We hear Jesus speak these words in Sunday's Gospel. "Save me from this Hour" (Jn 12:27). When I feel impelled in a desperate situation to say them many centuries later, Christ's lips move with mine. It is part of the mystery of our humanity that God has made us so fragile and then given us heavy burdens to bear. "Father, save me from this Hour."

This is not a firm declaration on Jesus' part. He had introduced that sentence by admitting, "I am troubled now. What should I say?" "Save me from this hour" is an answer He weighs and then moves away from. He recognizes that *this hour* has its own special purpose. For us, too, the hours we would want to be saved from carry a meaning in God's design. My Heavenly Father will explain their significance to me when I enter that realm where all questions find their answers. But until then, in every form of anguish, I have the overwhelming gift of Jesus my Brother who is with me whatever I am forced to undergo.

To be a Christian is to enter into a region where time is more than time. We have the Eternal Word Who took the burden of the passing moments in our behalf. These moments for Him as for us are sometimes weighed down by oppressive sadness and further deepened by apprehension that the sorrow might extend itself and dig further into more penetrating pain.

St. Therese of Lisieux, now a Doctor of the Church, wrote to a priest, "It is very consoling to think that Jesus, the Strong God, knew our weakness, that He trembled at the sight of the bitter chalice, this chalice that He had in the past so ardently desired to drink" (Letter 213, Vol II, ICS edition). The Son of God became Son of Mary to link Himself to what we endure of dread and fear. How much easier it would have been for Christ simply to observe our trials as an onlooker. Instead he entered into the very substance of human agonies. "Save me from this hour." Jesus shrinks from what lies ahead as we do when we are terrorized by possibilities that we feel unprepared for or unequal to.

As Christians, we do not turn to an aloof god, imploring the help of a deity far distant from our heart-piercing tragedies and losses. Our God has shed tears that streamed down His countenance in the same way that weeping wets our face. Now that He has entered into glory, He bends over us tenderly to wipe those streams of anguish. "The Lord lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down" (Ps 145:14). "He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps 147:3).

In many literary sagas, heroes show no feebleness, engaging in struggles with a power that vanquishes every rival. In such tales, we see figures raised high above mere

mortals, who astonish by their prowess. Jesus astonishes us in the opposite way--by embracing our weakness, by taking to Himself the feeling of being depleted, of losing strength, of submitting even to fright. What pagan god would allow such infirmity to dominate?

As children, the first experience of loss imprints itself on our awareness in a shock of terrible recognition: what we grasp in the hand and touch with our fingers can be taken away. Someone we love says good-bye and never comes back. This is a hard lesson at any age and human nature is early on educated in deprivation.

Love must too often put on garments of mourning. As the years extend, we receive further instructions about grieving. But we are given joy as well as sorrow and we find ourselves much more easily able to deal with gladness. This eagerness for delight shows how our created nature is essentially made for happiness. Suffering is like a detour we are forced to follow. Our ultimate goal is the fullness of bliss.

The Divine Word was willing to take on the harsh reality of a nature subject to pain in order that we would never be alone in our pain. We call our temporal existence here an exile. We have with us a fellow-exile Who chose to leave celestial blessedness to be with us. So truly with us that Jesus could say, "Save me from this hour," and then move forward to embrace all that it held. *He did so for our sake.*

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