

# Remember the cross



There comes a point in Lent every year when I find I can't go to Mass without tears. I landed in Rome and went to a 10 a.m. Mass the Fifth Sunday of Lent, and I was a waterfall. The English Mass at the Divine Mercy shrine, just a few blocks from St. Peter's Square, began with us singing "O Sacred Head Surrounded." I'm not sure how we can listen to or sing those words and not weep for love of God. It's quite amazing – almost unbelievable that Jesus did this for us.

If I got a vote about making recommendations to parishes about hymns, I'd say to stick with the likes of this one, which draws you into not only the Lenten season but the Mass and the source of all love.

"O sacred head, surrounded by crown of piercing thorn! O bleeding head, so wounded, so shamed and put to scorn! Death's pallid hue comes o'er thee, the glow of life decays; yet angel-hosts adore thee, and tremble as they gaze."

We are a culture that makes angels into cherubic trinkets. The thought of them trembling because of what is happening to Our Lord should make us tremble. The thought that this is because of our sins should change everything in our lives all over again. It beckons me to plead with God to reprioritize my life.

A day after arriving in Rome, I made my way to one of my favorite places, the Church of the Gesù, the mother church for the Jesuits in the Eternal City. The Sacred Heart Chapel, where I usually head for a Holy Hour, was closed for preparations for a concert, so I spent time with a graphic, bloody Jesus on the cross in another chapel, across from the sacristy. It made me think that instead of simply wearing

cross jewelry around our necks, how about we all make a point to keep Jesus crucified in view? To have his passion and death always in mind, always in view? Then we are not simply proclaiming with our fashion choices to belong to him, but we might actually seek to be refashioned by him for his loving service in the world. If you don't already, keep a depiction of the death of Jesus in view in your home throughout the year to keep this in mind.

I spend a lot of time being called into conversations about what's going on in Rome and in the Church on a hierarchical level. What about the rest of us? How can we be instruments of his transformative love?

Right after Mass the day I landed in Rome, Pope Francis appeared at a window to deliver his weekly Angelus reflection on the Gospel. He talked about not being condemnatory, but seeking forgiveness for our own sins. You might find that frustrating given the scandals, and there are reforms to be had and criticisms to be made. Nothing short of exorcisms need to happen in our world and, yes, even in our beloved Church. But that's never going to happen with all of us members of the Body of Christ sitting around pontificating. The Church needs our love. The Church needs us to love the precious blood of our Lord, which purifies and protects. After so many conversations, I just want to sing all over again: "In this thy bitter passion, Good Shepherd, think of me with thy most sweet compassion, unworthy though I be: beneath thy cross abiding for ever would I rest, in thy dear love confiding, and with thy presence blest."

It's not just a Lenten meditation. After the Easter Alleluias, keep what he did in mind. As we continue to pierce him with our sins, love him who loves us with such wondrous love. For every word we let rise of comment, draw deeper into the mystery and source of love. That's what the Church and the world needs from us. That's what gives meaning to the cross we may have on a chain around our necks – every day, not just

during Passiontide.

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