

Weeping in our prayer



I missed my opportunity to write a book titled “Why Is This Man Weeping?” Pope Francis would be on the cover. Early on in his pontificate, especially, he would talk about weeping. Weeping in prayer. He did a multi-hour prayer service to beg God to bring peace to Syria and elsewhere where the so-called Islamic State was about to ravage.

During the COVID shutdowns, I would watch the pope’s televised Masses from Santa Marta live. On March 29, 2020, he reflected: “Today, faced with a world that suffers greatly, many people who suffer the consequences of this pandemic, I wonder: Am I capable of weeping, as Jesus would certainly have done and does now? Is my heart like Jesus’?”

He continued: “[I]f my heart is not entering in and I am not capable of weeping, ask the Lord for this grace: Lord, that I might weep with you, weep with your people who are suffering right now. Many are weeping today. And we, from this altar, from this sacrifice of Jesus, of Jesus who was not ashamed of weeping, let us ask for the grace to weep. May today be for everyone like a Sunday of tears.”

Tears. Weeping. He’s talking about the depth of our prayers.

On May 2, 2015, I was in the front row at the North American Pontifical College when Pope Francis celebrated Mass. Presumably because of his one lung and bad knees (even then), he didn’t distribute Communion. I watched him for a long thanksgiving after he received Jesus. At one point, I wanted one of the seminarians serving to check on his vital signs. It seemed clear to me that he had gone to the depths in his prayer. Perhaps it was that the [groaning of the Holy Spirit](#) had taken over. We don’t always have to physically weep, but

how deep is our prayer?

Just this April – so maybe I didn't miss my window – he said during an audience: "Mary's tears were transformed by Christ's grace, just as her whole life, her whole being, everything in Mary is transfigured in perfect union with her Son, with his mystery of salvation. Therefore, when Mary weeps, her tears are a sign of God's compassion." God, he said: "who always forgives us with this compassion; they are a sign of Christ's sorrow for our sins, for the evil that afflicts humanity, especially the little ones and the innocent, who are the ones who suffer." He emphasized, far from the first time, that God never tires of forgiving us. We must keep going to him for forgiveness!

He's talked about the tears of a mother whose son is [enslaved by addiction](#). Many of us are generally afraid of tears. We worry that it shows weakness, or imbalance, and certainly vulnerability. But it is probably when we don't show those tears that we are in trouble.

When he was in Washington, D.C., in September 2015, Francis talked about the danger of becoming numb and going through life anesthetized. I fear this is exactly what we do when we binge on Netflix or walk around with headphones or indulge a little too often in something that we erroneously think will help with the pains of life.

We can't have joy without weeping. Because we can't have joy without knowing the love of God, that is so overwhelming on the cross. To really be at the foot of the cross, how can we not weep for the ultimate injustice done by my sins? And yet, knowing what God won for us on the cross, this is how we come to know joy.

A few weeks ago in Virginia, I attended the first Mass of a Dominican priest. At the moment of consecration, a toddler cried for his mother. I was astonished at what God allowed to

happen! Not only the changing of bread and wine into the body of Christ! But he also communicated to us that [we must go to Mary](#) and weep at the foot of the cross with her to know who we are, to understand anything about anything, to be with him. He gave us his mother who knows every sorrow. He wants us to be with her, stay with her, because she will make sure we are always with him.

It's pretty commonplace to hear people deriding "[thoughts and prayers](#)" after a tragedy. But is that in no small part because they don't see us weeping in our prayer? Weep with the pope and Jesus and we might just get somewhere better in building the Kingdom here.

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