

Just last month, Pope Benedict visited Poland and as part of his trip he visited Auschwitz.

**In the early 1940's, over a period of about 4 years,
1.1 million people died in this concentration camp;
of these, about one million of them
were Jewish men, women and children,
the others were Polish political prisoners, Soviet prisoners of war, Gypsy families,
homosexuals, people with disabilities
and prisoners of conscience or religious faith.**

In his speech at Auschwitz Pope Benedict said:

**"To speak in this place of horror,
in this place where unprecedented mass crimes
were committed against God and man,
to speak in this place of horror is almost impossible -
and it is particularly difficult and troubling for a Christian,
for a Pope from Germany.
In a place like this, words fail;
in the end, there can only be a dread silence -
a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God:
'Why, Lord, did you remain silent?
'How could you tolerate all this?'"**

The Holy Father continued:

**"...How many questions arise in this place!
Constantly the question comes up:
'Where was God in those days? Why was he silent?
How could he permit this endless slaughter,
this triumph of evil?'"**

**What I find particularly helpful about the Pope's comments
is that he did not, at the end of his speech, let God off the hook.**

**The dread silence continues to haunt
and the haunting questions go unanswered.
How does our loving God allow so much evil?**

**The scriptures today for the feast of the Holy Trinity,
a feast whose very subject is God,
these scriptures are much more upbeat and promising.
Deuteronomy asks us,**

**"Have you ever seen such a great God?
One who speaks to you, who takes you to himself,
who protects you with a strong hand and outstretched arm?"**

But where was this great God for his chosen people, the Jews,

when they were shipped to Auschwitz?
Where is the loving God when, in war and acts of terrorism
when the young and innocent are killed by the thousands?
Where is the healing God when epidemic disease
strikes whole nations and especially the poor?
Where is the God of creation when nature itself becomes our enemy
in tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes and floods.
Where is God's protective, outstretched arm when children are abused
by family members, friends and priests?
Where is the voice of God
when questions as painful as these
rise up to the heavens - yet go unanswered still?

On Trinity Sunday we celebrate our Christian belief that God,
in a mystery we cannot comprehend,
is three persons (Father, Son and Spirit) in one deity.

But in some way, the Trinity only triples our dilemma:
how is it that at least one person in the Trinity
would not bring an end to human suffering?
at least to the suffering of the innocent?

Actually, the response of the Trinity to human suffering is -
suffering -
the suffering of Christ on the Cross-,
for there on the Cross we see that this mysterious God of ours
did not exempt himself from suffering...
and surely the victim on the Cross
is the most innocent one of all.

The Father whose strong arm *seemed to fail* his Son
ultimately lifted him up.

The Son who *appeared to fail* miserably
is ultimately the victor over everything
- even over death!

The Spirit,
whose mysterious movement within and among us
is so often so difficult to understand and grasp,
the Spirit is the gift of the Risen Christ
leading us to trust in the Father
who did not spare his own Son the suffering of human pain.

The question, then, is perhaps less one of theological inquiry
and more one of faith:
Will we put our faith in a God
who chooses to suffer our own suffering?

I doubt there is anyone here who is a stranger to suffering
of one kind or another

and some of us are victims of great personal suffering –
and yet we are here.

We choose to worship a God
who chooses to deliver us from our suffering
by living it with us.

At this table, every week, we consume the body and blood
of the one who took our sins and suffering upon his shoulders
so that we might be forgiven
and find peace and respite from our pain.

I will close with a prayer attributed to Saint Patrick,
a prayer called his “Lorica” which means “breastplate”
– that piece of armor that protects the human heart.

It’s a prayer addressed to the Trinity...

*This day I bind to me forever, by power of faith:
the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three.*

*I bind this day to me forever, by power of faith:
Christ's Incarnation;
his baptism in the Jordan River;
his death on the cross for my salvation;
his bursting from the spiced tomb;
his riding up the heavenly way;
his coming at the day of doom.*

*I bind unto myself
the power of the great love of angels;
the sweet "Well done" in judgment hour;
the service of the archangels;
confessors' faith, apostles' word,
our forebears' prayers,
the prophets' scrolls;
all good deeds done unto the Lord,
and purity of virgin souls.*

*Today I bind unto myself:
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at evening,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks.*

*Today I bind unto myself:
the power of God to hold and lead,*

*God's eye to watch, God's might to stay,
God's ear to hearken to my need;
the wisdom of my God to teach,
God's hand to guide, God's shield to ward;
the word of God to give me speech,
God's heavenly host to be my guard.*

*Against the demon snares of sin,
the vice that gives temptation force,
the natural lusts that war within,
the hostile ones who mar my course;
of few or many, far or nigh, in every place, and in all hours
against their fierce hostility:
I bind to me these holy powers.*

*Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
against false words of heresy,
against the knowledge that defiles
against the heart's idolatry,
against the wizard's evil craft,
against the death-wound and the burning
the choking wave and poisoned shaft:
protect me, Christ, till your returning.*

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

*I bind unto myself the Name,
the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three.
Of whom all nature has creation,
eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
praise to the Lord of my salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord.*

