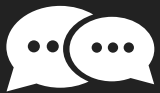


# KEEP COUNTING ON GOD

In his 2021 Easter Urbi et Orbi message (to the City and to the World), Pope Francis shares that the cross and resurrection of Christ are sources of hope for various people during pandemic times. He is hope for those who continue to suffer; for those who tend to the sick; for those who have lost jobs; and for those who have gone a long time without attending school.

Why? Because we know that Jesus' death and resurrection actually occurred. There is an empty tomb. God promised to save us and was faithful to His promise. And because Jesus conquered death by death on the cross, we know that all those who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 11:25).

Even now, we can continue to have hope - to have confidence in what God promised, And because we have experience that saving hope, we can also share that hope with others, being with them in their suffering so that they too can know God's hope and trust in His promises.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What have you learned from this time of pandemic?
- How have you turned to prayer and trusted in God?
- How has this time been an opportunity to empathize with and bring hope to others?
- How may God be calling you to bring hope to?

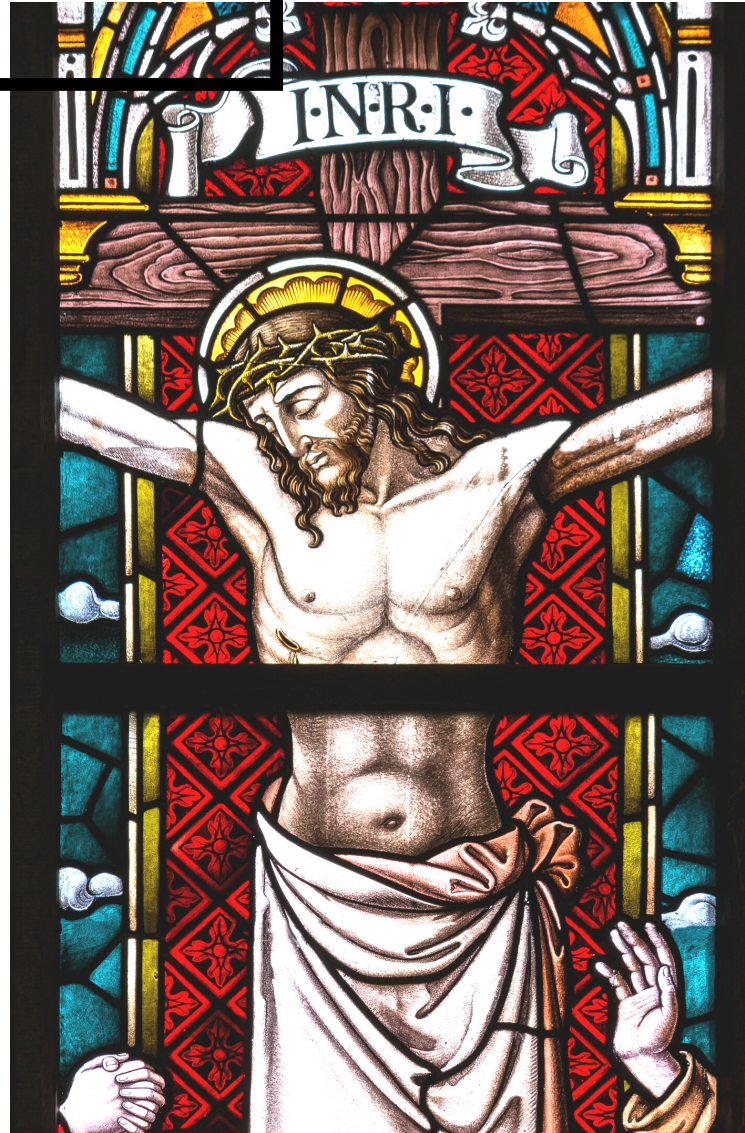


# FINDING GOD IN SUFFERING

We Jesus experience sorrow and suffering in Scripture. Upon hearing of Lazarus' death, Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus sweats drops of blood, an actual medical condition (hematohidrosis) brought on by immense anxiety (Lk 22:44). On the cross, Jesus experienced ridicule, pain, and death (Mt 27:42).

But in each instance, Jesus teaches us how to respond to suffering: with trust in God the Father. When He went to raise Lazarus, He first thanked the father. When suffering in the garden, He accepted God's will. When dying on the cross, He forgave His executioners, forgave the Good Thief, and commended His spirit into the Father's hands.

And in this Jesus revealed a fundamental truth: God does not abandon us in suffering. Rather, God is closest to the suffering and invites them to experience hope and resurrection by joining their pain to his. There is hope in redemptive suffering.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was a time when you experienced God's presence in the midst of suffering or crisis?
- How can you be a "Simon of Cyrene", accompanying those who suffer so that they encounter God in the midst of what they are going through?
- How can you offer up suffering for others? How can your sacrifices bring about good for others?





# HOPE & MERCY

Read Mt 25:31-46 and notice the works Jesus highlights in the Last Judgement. While we refer to them as works of mercy, they can just as easily be referred to as works of hope.

We may be inclined to turn to these in Lent, yet we are called to live the corporal and spiritual works of mercy year-round. When we do, we learn a sense of our responsibility and accountability to God and others. After all, Jesus shared that the greatest commandments are to love God above all things, and others as ourselves (Mt 22:36-40).

When we realize our imperfections and need to change, and ask for God's mercy, we allow God to refine us; to remove the obstacles that keep us from loving Him and others. When we remove the obstacles of sin, we can better engage in the works of hope the world desperately needs. So be healed so that you can heal. Experience God's mercy so that you can best live the works of mercy.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What keeps you from loving God above everything?
- What keeps you from helping those who are in need?
- What is our responsibility to each other in being a part of God's family?
- How can you use the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as a guide for bringing hope to others in your life?

