*** Franciscan-Clarian Spirituality Committee***

 ***The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross***

***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”***  ***(****Mt 27:46)*

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This cry of Jesus Christ is a response expressing human vulnerability to intense pain and suffering. Indeed, the cry of Jesus Christ is an indication that the Divine Begotten Son of the Father, really took our humanity through the mystery of the incarnation - clear confirmation that Jesus really shared our humanity, Jesus was truly human.

Within the context of faith, this cry of Jesus can afford us many lessons, and by extension offer us consolation if we acknowledge that Jesus’ response is a show of solidarity with all who suffer. Indeed, we have a companion in Jesus and an example to imitate when we question “the why” of suffering and evil which can seem so unjust, unreasonable, and unbearable in intensity. By His crying out, Jesus shared and identified with our instinctive human reaction to suffering and situations of injustice.

Some persons experiencing anguish in the face of evil and injustice can sometimes succumb to despair, that is a loss of hope and a giving up. They may become disillusioned concluding that God does not exist, or believe that God has abandoned them, so why maintain faith and hope? However, there is a lesson to be learned from Jesus.

The cry of Jesus was not a final statement. The fact that this cry of Jesus Christ quotes the first verse of Psalm 22, should lead us to reflect on the rest of the Psalm so as to understand and draw meaning from the context from which the cry of Jesus originated. The context was not one of despair. Was it desolation that human capacity for suffering was pushed to the limit? Yes! Jesus was overwhelmed by the present suffering. His cry resulted from the extreme mental trauma, agony and the severity of the torturous pain He was experiencing; but not despair! Hence, the context of Psalm 22 can help us to understand this cry with which most of us can identify, so that we can be led to participate in the obvious hope that Jesus shared with the psalmist.

Jesus found the words of the Psalm as capturing His anguish but this cry of anguish was not the defining commentary of His attitude to His suffering. With the psalmist, Jesus was crying out to be consoled in His suffering and ultimately declare confidence that He would be consoled:

- (vs 11) Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and no one to help me! - (vs 21) Save me from the lion's mouth, my poor life from the wild bulls’ horns! - (vs 23) You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All the race of Jacob, honor Him! Revere Him, all the race of Israel!'

 - (vs 24) For he has not despised nor disregarded the poverty of the poor, has not turned away His face, but has listened to the cry for help.

From experience our human condition reveals that we will at times encounter varying degrees of pain resulting from sickness, suffering because of natural disasters, and suffering from the injustice of others. More often than not, our human vulnerability instinctively reacts with less than noble Christian virtue. However, our ability and capacity to manage our responses can be learned from the example of Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Francis and Clare had a companion in Jesus, for no matter what they suffered, they never lost hope in God. They used their personal suffering as a means of solidarity with others, showing God’s love and compassion.

**PRAYER**

May our consideration of the words in Psalm 22 and action of Jesus in the face of extreme suffering facilitate for each of us a progression from instinctive reaction to suffering, pain, and injustice, to our discovering God’s providential purpose as our response to pain and suffering. Amen.