

# A Reflection for Holy Thursday and Good Friday

Elizabeth Gowans

## *Getting the feeling...*

**D**o this in memory of me'. The image of the long table with Jesus in the middle, one arm out, disciples arranged either side like the picture on the school wall. This is Jesus creating the first Holy Communion. Jesus breaks the bread. That means His body will be broken. He offers the chalice. This means that His blood will be spilt. For us. Because we sinned. Jesus goes on to suffer a horrible death. We know that. For us. So why can't we feel anything?

We've grown up with a sacred ceremonial rite, attending Mass as a form of learned behaviour. Retreats, morning and night prayers, the picture of The Sacred Heart on the bedroom wall, His open heart showing His love for us. This is our culture, our way of being, intellectualised, accepted with awe and reverence but with feelings?

In some parts of the world people weep and sob during Passion processions; nail individuals to crosses; pierce their own cheeks with nails.... My Goan friend flinches every time she hears the Host snap during the Consecration. "It's like hearing Christ's body broken," she whispers. We are capable of mass hysteria, of grief for Princess Diana and of private feelings, yet somehow, the Last Supper and all it means remain locked in the intellect.

Starting out at a smaller table than at the Last Supper, I put myself back at home, a small child watching my mother's hands easing the tea cosy off the pot,

lifting it, pouring the tea for each of us. These are hands I know, love and can remember, hands associated with the Godlike gifts of kindness, gentleness, care, forgiveness. I allow myself to imagine her saying: 'Do this in memory of me.' When I pour tea, I remember my mother pouring tea and think of her asking me to remember her when I 'do this'. More painful though, I imagine her breaking a scone in half, telling us that she is going to suffer and die... In the next instant I see my dear mother pulled about, dragged, thrashed, nailed ... I am overcome with emotion. Obviously I don't think my mother was crucified: she lived to a ripe old age. But it helps me to lock into Great Love cruelly, wickedly taken away – and I can switch the feeling to Jesus.

I started trying this when we had a very gentle long-haired priest. One day as I watched his hands hovering above the altar as he murmured the words, my mind went to him being nailed to a cross, seeing him blowing there, and the horror began. Because I knew him.

Is it that we don't 'know' Jesus? We know of Him, about Him. We talk to Him non-stop and He responds to us in ways we recognise. But we cannot put a face, a voice, a laugh – those features we use to 'know' people. But are human features the essences of people? Or just outward signs of their inner reality? If God uses the material world as an outward sign of an inner reality, may I not use the outward signs, the human person and features of my mother, to access the inner reality she shares with my concept of the inner reality of Jesus and thus access my feelings?

As females, we are used to interpreting our lives through the male gaze. For me, it is easier to identify with a female on the cross: the pain comes at once. So I briefly put my mother there. Heaven knows, I did it often enough in life! ■

Elizabeth Gowans is retired and lives in London with her husband and three cats. She spent much of her life travelling and writing and currently volunteers with refugees, prisoners and homeless people.

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