

Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want.” ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Now the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Easter hope

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The text we are listening to is in what is called the prayer in the garden. Jesus goes there to pray after the last supper and before his arrest. “The Hour” (in capitals and quotes) is coming closer, the moment when who he truly is and what his mission truly is will be manifested.

The scene that Matthew’s text describes is the moment of Jesus’s greatest crisis. Several times he tried to explain to his disciples that he would be handed over to death by his enemies and rise on the third day, but no one ever really understood him.

The idea his disciples had was different: the Messiah—as they understood it—would triumph over his enemies. In that oppressed and exploited nation there was a strong expectation of a revolutionary movement that would change things by making use of force and power.

Jesus, however, was convinced that he had to suffer and die. He understood himself not as a sociopolitical leader Messiah, who would fulfill the expectations of many Jews who

hoped for the political liberation of Israel, but as the suffering servant Messiah that he had seen and meditated on in the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of a servant of God who would free his people by being betrayed and by suffering, and not by power, triumph or dominating his enemies.

Jesus knew that “his hour” is arriving, the hour of his manifestation as the suffering servant, totally stripped of power and manifesting himself in “his hour” as a weak and fragile victim of evil and of his enemies. He knew that this was the path he had chosen. Nonetheless, he still felt within himself the normal reaction against suffering and death that is part of human nature.

Jesus was in the Father’s hands and knew that the Father would not abandon him, even if at that moment he experienced abandonment and sorrow. But that was his HOPE. There are times when we feel lonely and abandoned. True hope is rooted in the certainty that, whatever happens, we are in the hands of the Father, the Abba. Hope is not the certainty that we will conquer by force those who are different or oppose us but that, already in this difficult situation that we may experience personally, as a society or as a community, God the Father of our Lord Jesus, will never abandon us.

In social life in this world, with its wars and thirst for domination and power, we also need this hope. In the churches and religions, we need this hope which at times is felt as a hoping against all hope.

The new world made up of simple service and love of neighbor is ALREADY a present reality. Just as in that hour of abandonment and the misunderstanding of the disciples, when the enemies of Jesus conspired to eliminate him, Jesus abandoned himself into the Father’s hands and remained faithful to his conviction—service and humility are what conquers evil and not conquest, arrogance and power.

Jesus’s prayer at the worst time of his agony, when he knew that he had to face the power of evil all alone, teaches us too to be faithful to our convictions, above all to the conviction that God is our Father and that we can always trust him.

Questions for sharing

- x Do I understand what “the Hour” means for Jesus? Have there been similar moments in my experience?*
- x Are having power over and controlling others or reality a temptation for me?*
- x Am I familiar with experiences of humble service that give me hope?*