

PALM SUNDAY - YEAR A

[Is 50:4-7; Phil 2:6-11; Mt 26:14 - 27:66]

Excerpts from Pope Francis - 2023

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29 March 2026

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (*Mt 27:46*). This is the cry, the only cry that Jesus makes from the cross. Those words bring us to the very heart of Christ’s passion, the climax of the sufferings he endured for our salvation. “Why have you forsaken me?”. The sufferings of Jesus were many, and whenever we listen to the account of the Passion, they pierce our hearts. There were *sufferings of the body*: the slaps and beatings, the flogging and the crowning with thorns, and in the end, the cruelty of the crucifixion. There were also *sufferings of the soul*: the betrayal of Judas, the denials of Peter, the condemnation of the religious and civil authorities, the mockery of the guards, the insults at the foot of the cross, the rejection of the crowd, and the flight of the disciples. Yet, amid all these sorrows, Jesus remained certain of one thing: the closeness of the Father.

Now, however, the unthinkable has taken place. Before dying, he cries out: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” This is the most searing of all sufferings, *the suffering of the spirit*. At his most tragic hour, Jesus experiences abandonment by God. Prior to that moment, he had never called the Father by his generic name, “God”. To convey the impact of this, the Gospel also reports his words in Aramaic. These are the only words of Jesus from the cross that have come down to us in the original language. The real event is the extreme humiliation, being forsaken by the Father, forsaken by God. We find it hard even to grasp what great suffering he embraced out of love for us.

And he cries out: “Why?” A “why” that embraces every other “why” ever spoken. “Why, God?”. “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” In the Bible, the word “forsake” is powerful. We hear it at moments of extreme pain: love that fails or is rejected or betrayed; broken marriages, forms of social exclusion, injustice and oppression; the solitude of sickness. In a word: “abandonment”. Christ brought all of this to the cross; upon his shoulders, he bore the sins of the world. And at the supreme moment, Jesus, the only-begotten, beloved Son of the Father, experienced a situation utterly alien to his very being: abandonment, the distance of God. Why did it have to come to this? *He did it for us*. There is no other answer.

Brothers and sisters, today this is not merely a show. This abandonment is the price he paid for me. He became one with each of us in order to be completely and definitively one with us to the very end. He experienced abandonment in order not to leave us prey to despair, in order to stay at our side forever. Whenever you or I or anyone else seems pinned to the wall, lost in a blind alley, plunged into the abyss of abandonment, sucked into a whirlwind of so many “whys” without an answer, there can still be a hope.

It is not the end, because Jesus was there and even now, he is at your side. There, we find him. Amid all my unanswered questions “why...?”, he is there. On the cross, even as he felt utter abandonment – this is the ultimate end – Jesus refused to yield to despair; instead, he prayed and trusted.

Brothers and sisters, a love like this, embracing us totally and to the very end, the love of Jesus, can turn our stony hearts into hearts of flesh. His is a love of mercy, tenderness and compassion. Christ, in his abandonment, stirs us to seek him and to love him and those who are themselves abandoned. For in them we see not only people in need, but Jesus himself, abandoned: Jesus, who saved us by descending to the depths of our human condition. He is with each of them, abandoned even to death...

He wants us to care for our brothers and sisters who resemble him most, those experiencing extreme suffering and solitude. Entire peoples are exploited and abandoned; the poor live on our streets and we look the other way; there are migrants who are no longer faces but numbers; there are prisoners who are disowned; people written off as problems. Countless other abandoned persons are in our midst, invisible, hidden, discarded with white gloves: unborn children, the elderly who live alone: they could perhaps be your father or mother, your grandfather or grandmother, left alone in retirement homes, the sick whom no one visits. The disabled who are ignored, and the young burdened by great interior emptiness, with no one prepared to listen to their cry of pain. The abandoned of our day. The “Christs” of our day. Jesus, in his abandonment, asks us to open our eyes and hearts to all who find themselves abandoned. For us, as disciples of the “forsaken” Lord, no man, woman or child can be regarded as an outcast, no one left to himself or herself.

Brothers and sisters, today let us implore this grace: to love Jesus in his abandonment and to love Jesus in the abandoned all around us. Let us ask for the grace to see and acknowledge the Lord who continues to cry out in them.