

THE
PASSION
OF
CHRIST



A WOMAN'S
PERSPECTIVE

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Roseleen Walsh

CHRISTS PASSION FROM A WOMANS PERSPECTIVE

When I was approached by Fr Turley to speak here tonight I immediately agreed. I have never publicly spoke before about my faith or my views on the passion of Christ – so I suppose to some of you it would seem strange that without any apparent thought I should agree so instantly to bare my soul to you all here tonight. I did so because I believe – it is what God must want – for what ever reason and that is my belief. I'm not a theologian but, I am a woman who has lived for almost half a century and during that time so many changes have taken place in our communities, changes that have had an enormous effect on all our lives; changes especially since 1969. We all have different ideas on change, things change sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worst, but things change and with it our way of life and our way of thinking. I think the older we get the greater the sense of God through out our past lives, we can see and understand much more clearly.

Up until '69 my family were like any other family in the Andersonstown area of Belfast. We all went to mass and confession and practised our religion to the best of our ability, and, looking back, I can see that the greatest gift my parents passed on to us, was love for almighty God. Or maybe I can put it another way – in our lives with all our ups and downs, a way to still love God; to practice our religion in the mist of despair, turmoil, torture and imprisonment and every other trail that the years following '69 were to bring. Through the years I have developed a capacity to – with that inner eye see Jesus in all things – or at least try to see him. I haven't had a bad nor a hard life, so I find it easy to see with that inner eye God's love for me, in all aspects of my life. I feel at times his guiding arms around me, and at times I have felt myself cling to his cloak for fear of losing myself. I feel so much joy when I see his sky at night – when I smell the smells carried on the breeze that he provides for me alone and for you alone, his sea, the birds of the air and hear the music of their song and most of all when I see people who love and people who are 'in love', I see him every where. But I also feel his hurt when I see injustice – of any kind. The injustice of poverty, of poor housing, of discrimination, when I see people who are broken hearted – for what ever reason – people who are treated as if they don't matter, hungry people, home-less people, child-less couples, people who have no one to call their own. When I see people who are treated with indifference by an uncaring society – by governments, I wonder where Christ is among them – but in faith I know – I believe he is there – always.

I can only do this talk my own way, I don't lead what any one would call a typical life. I do my best in my own way, I can do it no other way. Once years ago I was on a bus run and on the way to our destination and on the way home there was a sing song. The most frequently sang song was 'I did it my way' by Frank Sinatra and it didn't take a great ear for music to realise that every singer did sing it their way, and I thought that was a great metaphor about life. We each have a song and some times we keep in tune and then other times we're way out, we just can't get it right, but if we're singing to the one who loves us it doesn't matter, because, even if we can't sing and get it wrong, it

will always be music to their ears. And that's a bit like God's love for us, even when we get it wrong – he still loves us.

I want to begin with the temple scene; (pause for other reader)

When Jesus wrecked the temple he knew what it was like to be angry – and through this event I want to begin to express how I as a woman see 'the passion of Christ'. I wrote this short monologue some time ago – I called it –

My Father

(Christ is kneeling in the corner of a room, he is alone, and in need to talk to his father about what has just happened in the temple; like any son or daughter, no matter what age, when we've done something in anger, justifiable or not, we still need to be reassured that those we love will understand and still accept us, so I see Christ here as feeling vulnerable, like we all feel at times, even though Christ would not have doubted his fathers love for him)

My Father who art in heaven hallow be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, give me this day, our daily bread. Dear Father – my Lord and my God – Father understand your son. What Mark and Mathew will say is true but John got the real sense of things as he stood back and observed. What he will record will be an insight into how I felt. He realised that this was the first time I really expressed anger – Father, this emotion more so than any other, that is part of the human condition, frightened me. I didn't think I was capable of such force, such violence, I felt a loss of control. Anger, Father, must always be accompanied by control. It is difficult but it must be achieved. As John watched, I could see his blood drain, he trembled. It was the realisation that I really was like him, human. Because of all the miracles he watched me perform he really didn't believe I was like him, human, and now this is what happened Father. I went up to Jerusalem and found in the temple area those who selling oxen, sheep and doves and the money changers seemed to be everywhere. So, I made a whip out of cords, such was the anger that consumed me and I drove them all out of the temple areas with their sheep and oxen, and spilled the very coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves I shouted "take these out of here, and stop making my Fathers house a marketplace" and some of them recalled the words of scripture, "seal for your Fathers house will consume me". And then some shouted "what sign can you show us for doing this?" and I shouted back "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". I knew they wouldn't understand. Father, I knew. Then they laughed and geared asking how could I rebuild something that took 46 years to build in the first place, and how could I, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph the carpenter, and Mary, boast of building it up again in 3 days. Father help me to understand myself. Father – I need my mother to embrace me! Father where is she?

We can surely all understand the anger Jesus felt when he witnessed this invasion of his fathers house, his anger was justified. When I reflect on this event – I think of my own family – when the British army invaded our home – many times, and on 1 occasion myself and my 3 sisters had to get up from bed at rifle point and get dressed while the soldiers geared and laughed at us. After each raid my mother would bless our home with holy water, we felt the need to be cleansed.

Now I would like to visit the Garden of Gethsemane.

‘My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay here and watch’. (St. Mark X1V – 34) And yet they couldn’t watch – they fell asleep as he knelt to pray a few yards from them in the garden and ‘they loved him’. They loved him so much they were willing to die for him – but they couldn’t stay awake for him. They were so near and yet so far they didn’t really understand. If they’d understood what was about to happen, would they have fallen asleep? – if we’d been there, would we have fallen asleep – could we have read the signs – the desperation, the aloneness – the despair – these are things Christ must have felt. And all the time alone. It’s strange – though in the past, I thought I understood how Christ felt in the garden of Gethsemane – and recent events in our own community have taught me, that, not in a million years could I ever understand how Christ must have felt. It may seem an unrealistic analogy – but because there have been so many suicides in our community these last few years – I realise that I can’t know the real depth of another persons inner pain – I can’t know any ones despair – no one can – only Christ. In that garden – he suffered every ones despair, regardless of the reason why people go into despair – only he truly knows; and I have come to that conclusion for this reason, if his dearly beloved apostles who were with him didn’t understand his inner pain, how can we truly understand any ones!

Now on to Peters denial of knowing Jesus. (pause for the other reader)

Peters denial of Jesus may have hurt Jesus more than the crown of thorns that were placed with such force into his fore head, in a sick mocking gesture by his captors. It hurts so much when those we love or those we’ve built our lives around let us down, for what ever reason, when we need them most. As a female internee, I felt let down by the Catholic Church. I wrote this poem in prison in 1973 and its called

To My Silent Church

Silence or Cell,

Divided nations conquer well

For imitation love of peace

Give all up to the oppressor

Lose all, forget those who have given all

So you can live in your imitation home

Made of imitation security.

Silence or Cell?

I choose cell.

My words were quiet

But I was not silent

I did not want the cell

It came – because
I could not bare the Silence.
The Silence was imitation
Not truth.
Incomprehensible.
Christ died because he could
Not stand the Silence.
Because of your Silence
I am condemned
To be without freedom,
I am therefore dead!
Speak! Act now
Silent ones.

Now I would like to move along to the stations of the cross. When I do the stations of the cross I reflect on where I am in the stations and also where Christ is in my stations of the cross. For tonight I will relate how some times I mediate on the stations of the cross.

The first station: Jesus is condemned to death. (pause for other reader)

Father I ask you to help me never to judge. I know I do. I know I shouldn't. Father as you stood before Pilate an innocent man, you were unjustly condemned and sentenced to death, I understand, I also stood before a judge when I was interned in Armagh prison. There were also lies told under oath by people who hid behind a screen and I was also condemned. As you forgave your judge I also forgave mine. I ask, Father, that our eyes may be opened to recognise truth and justice.

Second station: Jesus is laden with the cross. (pause for other reader)

What is my cross Lord? Have I already carried it? Was it that burden of resentment I carried during the H Blocks, when among many other incidents, I saw my brother, whom I didn't recognise as he stood next to me on a visit and as he spoke my name, I asked, 'who are you, do I know you?' I still didn't recognise him and then Martin told me he didn't recognise him either. They held him down when he refused to wash and they scrubbed his naked body with deck scrubbers. If that was my cross Lord, then there have been many others. My resentment weighted heavy on your shoulders Lord, forgive me for that, Lord, but no one else loved me enough to carry it. Lord help all women to recognise their cross and give them the strength and courage to carry it.

Third station: Jesus falls the first time under the cross. (pause for other reader)

Lord, when you fell that first time you could have stayed on the ground and refused to go any further but for me, for all of us, you got up and carried on. Lord please help all who fall, especially

all alcoholics, all problem drinkers, all gamblers, all drug addicts and all those who have problems of addiction. Please, Lord help us all in our weakness, and if we fall let us see our fall for what it is – a temporary set-back. Lord give us all the strength and courage to carry on.

Fourth station: Jesus meets his afflicted mother (pause for other reader)

The saddest station Lord when you and your broken-hearted mother met on your road to Calvary. Only a mother can know the feeling of desperation and helplessness when her child is in pain and in brokenness. I pray Lord for all mothers who are broken-hearted because of their children – for what ever reason – I pray for all mothers who didn't sleep last night because their child didn't come home and they didn't know where their child was or what they were doing. I pray for all mothers who do vigil over their child's sick bed and I remember Lord all the hunger-strikers mothers and wives who held the hands of their dying sons and loved ones as they watched them die. My prayer for them all, Lord, is that they can take heart from your own mother who also stood by you at the foot of your cross.

Fifth Station: Simon the Cyrenean helps Jesus to carry his cross. (pause for other reader)

That brief relief from the pain of the cross digging into your poor flesh may not have meant so much to you Lord because you knew that Simon didn't really want to help in the first place and also the soldiers only wanted to keep you alive only for the final humiliation of stripping you naked and nailing you to the cross for all to see. Lord please help me to help others willingly, please give me the strength I need. Please help all those mothers who are burdened by the cross of an uncaring family.

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. (pause for other reader)

My God, only a woman could be so thoughtful as to understand the relief of sweat being wiped away as it pours from a pain riddled body. The trickle of sweat and blood as it oozes from a woman in labour is a source of great discomfort but also a source of great joy, because she knows that soon her pain will be over and she will give birth. But for you Lord, you had no such comforting thoughts, for your sweat and blood could only end in death. Your death. Father help me please to always be sensitive to the needs of others.

Seventh Station: Jesus fall the second time. (pause for other reader)

As you fell Lord for the second time the pain of all your wounds must have been unbearable. So unbearable I can't imagine. Please my God, when I fall help me to get up and carry on, but, more than that Father, please help me never to bring any one down with me if I should fall, help me especially to never bring any one down from your grace.

Eighth Station: Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem.. (pause for other reader)

Jesus, in all your pain you still stopped and spoke to the women who followed you. Whose dedication to you, you appreciated. Lord when I see this station I remember the women of the Green Cross, who collected year in and year out for 30 years, from door to door and at times suffered the insult of doors being slammed in their faces. But they continued this task weekly for the benefit of the families of prisoners in Long Kesh. and did it in every kind of weather. I'm sure a

lot of the times they would have preferred to have been in their own homes with the comfort of their warm fires on winter evenings Lord please help us to be dedicated to those we know who are in need.

Ninth Station: Jesus fall a third time. (pause for reader)

I have cried many times when I visit this station and I remember it was for you final humiliation that the soldiers dragged you on. Forgive us Lord for we know not, what we do. I wonder, Lord, how did the soldiers feel about dragging you like that, afterwards, when it was all over? Did they laugh or pretend to themselves that it was their duty? I remember also Lord, when my friend, Martina Anderson was in Durham prison and was brought to an outside hospital for a minor guiney operation. On her return to the prison on the same day she was bleeding and was wearing no underwear. She was still only semi-conscious and was unable to walk, so her guards dragged her along the hospital corridor and dumped her into the prison van. Lord help us all to treat one another with respect and dignity.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments. (pause for other reader)

The pain and humiliation of your cloths being pulled from your torn flesh Lord, is hard to think about, because, it causes me so much pain. Please forgive us for we stood ideally by Lord. Your humiliation was shared by women prisoners in Armagh and in Brixton. Martina was stripped searched every day for 13 months even though she was going no where and had no visitors except once a month. Lord help me to always be conscious of what I say and do that might make someone feel less than equal or a lesser human being than I would like to be made feel myself.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross. (pause for other reader)

Jesus I believe it must have been a relief for you when you were forced to lie down to be nailed to the cross – the weight of the cross taken for those few brief moments from your torn and broken body. I have hoped that your poor limbs were numb, and, that at that stage, you felt no pain. I regret my part in driving those nails through your hands and feet – I am truly sorry for the crown of thorns I helped hammer into your tender flesh. My God – in all I do, help me ease your pain – give me strength that I might endure with love for you, all the pain and sorrow that may come my way, as a mother. Please my God help all victims of rape – all those whose lives have been nailed forever to a cross.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross. (pause for other reader)

Lord – I never really know what to say when I reach this station. Words are useless. Silence somehow seems more appropriate than words. Because in Silence there is calm – and where there is calm sometimes we can find opportunities for peace. We can't have peace where there is chaos. Father grant all mothers peace of mind – peace in their homes and peace in their worlds.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken from the cross. (pause for other reader)

Father it must have been a source of joy for your mother and friends to know that you were finally out of your earthly pain. I pray for all those who this day mourn and grieve the loss of some one they love and care both, for and about.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb. (pause for other reader)

How happy they were to receive your body Lord. It must have comforted their grieving hearts.

Father – I know how much it means to all those who have lost some one to have their body to say that final good-bye in earthly terms – father I pray for all those who mourn and grieve this day and have no body. You and your mother have stood along with the families of the ‘disappeared here in our country – on the beach and in the woods and fields – your hearts have bled for and along with those families. Please my God – please help and comfort all those who mourn and grieve and have no body. Please direct the vision and hands of those who are digging for the remains. My Lord and my God.

And along with that prayer for the disappeared, I would now like to lead the way over to Our Lady’s Alter to give honour to the Mother of God on this ‘Mother’s Day’. And with these flowers I ask each of us to say aloud (if we so choose) our petition or thanks to Mary. And let each flower be a symbol of our love and faith that every prayer is always heard.



