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Tell Me, What Hurts Me?

By Rev. Walter J. Burghardt, SJ

Today's Gospel is a sizzler. Especially if your bankbook is full of credits, your stomach filled with food, your mouth full of laughter, and everybody loves you. And still, I shall not preach on Luke's beatitudes and woes. Not from cowardice. Simply because I told you all about them two years ago, and if your memory has dimmed you can read it in *Sir, We Would Like To See Jesus*, pages 93—98, now available in paperback at $8.95. What I propose to do is try to get inside the Jesus who pronounces "blessed" those who are poor or hungry, in tears or hated. This may (1) tell us something important about Jesus and (2) say something imperative to us.

I

First, Jesus. A remarkable Hasidic rabbi, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev in the Ukraine, used to say that he had discovered the meaning of love from a drunken peasant. The rabbi was visiting the owner of a tavern in the Polish countryside. As he walked in, he saw two peasants at a table. Both were gloriously in their cups. Arms around each other, they were protesting how much each loved the other. Suddenly Ivan said to Peter: "Peter, tell me, what hurts me?" Bleary-eyed, Peter looked at Ivan: "How do I know what hurts you?" Ivan's answer was swift: "If you don't know what hurts me, how can you say you love me?"

Do you know what made Jesus so loving a person, the greatest lover in history? He knew what hurts us. He knew then and he knows now.

What hurts the human heart Jesus knew, precisely as a man, as human. It shows up all through his public life: with the woman caught in adultery, in danger of stoning; the sinful woman who touches him, to the scandal of his host; the Samaritan woman at the well, to the amazement of his disciples; the women of Jerusalem who weep for him on the way of the cross. It shows up in all those passages that describe Jesus as having "compassion"—a Greek verb that has to do with our inward parts, our entrails, our bowels, our heart—a word that is a wedding of mercy and affection and sympathy and fellow feeling. This powerful verb is used over the sick who reach out to Jesus, a crowd that is hungry, a mother whose only son has died, a king's servant dreadfully in debt, a boy cruelly tormented by an evil spirit, two blind men sitting by the roadside, a leper begging to be made clean, a man left half-dead by robbers, the prodigal son.

To all of these the Lord reached out, for each his heart was torn. Not a sweet, sickly,

syrupy, sentimental feeling; he felt what they were feeling. Not because he was all-knowing God, but because he was all-human man. He was so exquisitely human that he was attuned to all that was human. Not indeed to adultery but to the adulteress, not to leprosy but to each leper, not to a dead Lazarus but to his sorrowing sisters. In fact, this *was* his humanness: He vibrated to, resonated to, the loves and hates, the hopes and fears, the joys and sadness of each person who touched his life.

This is the Jesus who says "Blessed are you poor...you that hunger...you that weep...Blessed are you when people hate you..." He knew what hurt them. How did he get that way? In large measure, by experiencing it. He did not discover poverty by reading unemployment figures in Jerusalem's gazette; he had no home, he told us, "nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 8:20). No one had to tell him what hunger tastes like; he went without food for forty days in the desert. Tears were not what other people shed; he wept over Jerusalem and over Lazarus, over his city and his friend. He did not hear about hatred from his disciples; his own townspeople tried to throw him over a cliff, and his own people finally had him nailed to a cross.

Over and above that, Jesus went out to where these people were. He did not wait in Nazareth's synagogue for the hungry and the sorrowing to make an appointment. He went looking for them—on foot and by boat. One sentence in Matthew is typical: "Jesus went about all their cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every kind of disease and infirmity" (Mt 9:35). And one story in Mark gets to the heart of the matter, to the heart of Jesus. A woman whose life has been bleeding away for twelve years pushes through a tremendous crowd, comes up behind Jesus, touches his garment. She feels in her body that she has been healed. Jesus is aware that power has gone forth from him. What does he do? He doesn't take pride or pleasure in it, like a Washington Redskin doing a victory dance in the end zone. He quickly asks: "Who touched my garments?" The disciples are amazed, almost amused: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say `Who touched me?'" But he keeps looking around, till the woman comes in fear and trembling and tells him the whole truth. And Jesus explains to her what has happened: "Your faith has made you well; go in peace..." He is not curing a disease; he is healing a person. And so he wants eyes to meet; he wants to see a face; he wants to explain what has really happened in the depths of her heart, her faith in him that brought healing. So far she has only "heard the reports" about him; he wants her to *know him* (cf. Mk 5:25—34).

Even more marvelously, Jesus not only knew what hurt his fellow Jews; he knows what hurts you and me. This is not pious poetry. The risen Jesus is not a vague figure in outer space. His resurrection did not remove him from us; it simply made it possible for him to touch not only Decapolis but the District of Columbia, not only Magdalene but me. It is the same Jesus, you know—save that we do not see his gentle smile, do not hear the music or thunder of his voice, cannot touch the hem of his garment. Your Christian living makes no sense unless you believe that at this moment Jesus knows what hurts you. Not only knows but knowing seeks you out—whatever your kind of poverty or hunger, however you weep, wherever you feel unloved. His plea to his people is his promise to us: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). It's another profound Christian paradox: Jesus does indeed seek you out, but you have to "come to" him. With the Canaanite woman in Matthew, you have to bend the knee before him and cry out "Lord, help me!" (Mt 15:25).

II

Yes, Jesus knows what hurts us, and so we can turn to him with confidence. The problem is not with Christ; the problem is with Christians. There is a danger in the beatitudes. It is all too easy for me to repeat the words of Jesus: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you...Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven..." (Lk 6:20—23). It is the ever-present peril in any religion like ours: If things are rough for you down here, my friend, forget it, hang in there, keep a stiff upper lip. Beyond this vale of tears there's another life, where virtue will be rewarded, where the good guys will have all the fun and the bad guys will be roasted.

This I do not deny, but it is only half the story. The same Jesus who told the poor and the hungry, the distressed and the despised, that they were special to him, told us that we shall inherit his kingdom, rate eternal life, only if we reach out to them. With gifts indeed: bread for the swollen belly and water for parched lips, a warm bed for the homeless and clean clothes for the ragged, a word of comfort for the sick and the chained (cf. Mt 25:34—36). But even that, good as it is, is not good enough—not Christlike enough, not human enough. I have to care, I have to love. Unless you love, the seventeenth-century apostle of charity St. Vincent de Paul used to warn his followers, unless you love, the poor will resent the bread they have to take from you.

Loving the outcast, loving the unloved—all but impossible, unless you know what hurts them. Not from the Washington *Post* or the Department of Labor. Here, I fear, there is no substitute for experience. I talk with a young Georgetown grad who has sweated a year with the poorest of the poor in Nicaragua. He has lived their hurts, those hurts are his, he is different deep within. I talk with a G.U. girl who spends hours in downtown D.C. with drug addicts, battered women, prostitutes. Now college life has a different look about it; even the Pub—not bad, just a little sad. I talk with Dahlgren choir members who sing liturgy at the D.C. jail. They have touched what it feels like to live without windows, wear the same old blue jumpsuits, have nothing to do that delights you, languish for months before coming to trial, give birth to your baby behind bars and have the infant torn from you. Now words of the Mass that slipped so easily from their lips take on meaning: "May the Lord accept this sacrifice at our hands to the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and for the good of *all His Church*." The good of *all* God's people...the prisoners they know. Listen to one prisoner's letter (and he's not there for stealing Godiva chocolates):

I want to take time to thank you and the beautiful Georgetown University choir for coming out and being a part of the services here. I shall always cherish that experience because of the love I felt when I walked into that room. And I anxiously look forward to seeing and singing with all of you again in the future. May the Lord richly bless and keep each and every one of you.

"The love I felt when I walked into that room." It reminds me of a memorable sentence in St. Augustine: "There is nothing that invites love more than to be beforehand in loving; and that heart is over-hard which, even though it were unwilling to bestow love, would be unwilling to return it."1 Love gives birth to love.

Believe me, I am not laying a guilt trip on the Dahlgren community. If I were, my own face would have much more egg on it than yours. I am not missioning you to Latin

America or 14th Street or the D.C. jail. These are simply examples; they illustrate how we can experience what hurts our brothers and sisters. What kind of experience God is actually calling any of you to, I consider privileged communication.

Still, Lent is coming up fast—this very Wednesday. You will be moving from ashes to crucifixion, reliving the dying that gave you life. If you are looking for a way to share Jesus' passion, share his compassion. The world you walk, however small, is heavy with hurt—some of it obvious to the naked eye, much of it cooped up inside skin. Why not make Lent a search for others' hurt? Oh, not a door-to-door questionnaire: "Tell me where you hurt, my dear." That might be counterproductive: "Get lost!" The search is more subtle, more complex, more Christlike. Ask God for increased sensitivity to needs and moods. Don't be put off by a forbidding face; we all look like that at times. Forget the jungle jingle "Do unto others before they do it unto you." Bear with those who bore you. Above all, listen; be present to another with your whole self, heart and marrow. For that, you don't need a hatful of answers; only the scatterbrain spouts the antidote to every hurt from acne to heartbreak.

Dear friends, many of you love to pray the lovely prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy." Here's your chance, without leaving the States or even the District. Tremendous crowds surround you, as they did Jesus. Every so often someone in the crowd will pluck up courage, touch the sheer edge of you. But you won't feel it unless Jesus' insistent question becomes your own persistent quest: "Who touched me?" You won't sense it unless, like Jesus, you are open to it, unless you *want* to be touched, unless you have the courage to touch the compassion of Christ to another.

So, why not supplement *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* with the Lord's Lenten Special? You have to "stay the course": forty days stretching out your total self to those who hurt. Do that and you just might turn the Gospel woes into beatitudes: Blessed are you rich and full, blessed are you who laugh and are loved; for you have enriched others and filled their hungers, have brought laughter to their lips and love to their lives. Blessed are you!

Woe to You Who Are Rich?

By Rev. Walter J. Burghardt, SJ

Good friends: Over the past month, I experienced a terrible temptation. A temptation difficult to resist. No, it was not sexual; it wasn't that pleasant. I was tempted to let today's Gospel go, focus on Jeremiah. Why not enjoy the *prophet's* blessing and woe? "Blessed is the man or woman who trusts in the Lord." "Cursed is [woe to] the man or woman who trusts in humans,…whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jer 17:7, 5). Great homiletic stuff. Why ruffle your Sunday feathers with woe on you if you are well off financially, woe if you shop at Sutton Place Gourmet, woe if your laugh meter is "off the wall," woe if everybody likes you? And then wash my hands of it, blame it all on Jesus.

The problem is, I cannot skip Luke today and pretend I am preaching the Christian

gospel.1 Not when I am directing a national project called *Preaching the Just Word*, an effort to move the preaching of social justice issues more effectively into all the Catholic pulpits of our country. But is it now my God-given task to reproach the rich, savage the well-lined stomach, go for the jugular if you are joyful? The problem is agonizingly real, for it asks questions basic to Christian living. So then, suppose we do three things: (1) find out what Luke's Jesus was saying then, (2) go on to ask what the risen Jesus might be saying to us now, and (3) try our hand at rephrasing Luke's beatitudes for our time, our situation.2

I

First, what was Luke's Jesus saying then? Here you must be extraordinarily careful. You cannot cut Luke into a thousand pieces, take a paragraph here or there, study it in isolation, and conclude: Ah, here is the real Jesus.

You see, Luke is puzzling. On the one hand, hardly another New Testament writer save "James" speaks so bluntly about material possessions. On this score all too many Christian disciples left Luke less than ecstatic. On the other hand, Luke leaves us puzzled: Who is the real Jesus? There is the radical Jesus: Give it *all* up! Unless you "say good-bye to *all*" you have, you "cannot be a disciple of mine" (Lk 14:33). All of it. "You cannot serve both God and money" (16:13). "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (18:25)—the largest of Palestinian animals and the tiniest of openings the Jews knew. It is to the poor that the kingdom of God belongs (6:20). He himself "had nowhere to lay his head" (9:58).

Then there is the moderate Jesus. He wants you to use possessions prudently. One prudent way: Give alms (11:41). Then remember Zacchaeus, small in size but big in bucks: "Look, Sir," he says to Jesus, "half of what I own I give to the poor." Not all I own; half. Jesus' reply? "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:8—9). He had well-to-do friends—Lazarus, Martha, Mary. Galilean women of means provided for him and the Twelve (8:3). This Jesus reminds us of John the Baptist, usually quite radical as he munches locusts in the wilderness. The crowds plead with him when baptized by him, when moved to repentance: "What shall we do?" His reply? Do you have two coats? Give one to the poor (3:10—11). One.

Well now, will the real Jesus please stand up? Which is it to be, no riches or some? Give it all away, or share some of it? Not easy to say. Even Scripture scholars are puzzled. But a liturgy is not a classroom; a homily is not a lecture. And so, while the experts are trying to make exegetical sense out of the paradox, let's see what the paradoxical Jesus might be saying to us today.

II

On the one hand, the radical Jesus must never cease to challenge us. You see, nothing, absolutely nothing, should take precedence over Christ in my life. But history, my history, tells me that there is a peril in any possession, whether it's an adult's million-dollar home or a child's "raggedy Ann," whether it's the presidency or a pastorate, whether it's profound knowledge or a touch of power, my law firm or my ad agency, my books or my stamp collection, my health or my wealth—whatever I "own." The peril? Simply that it's mine, and it can become the center of my existence. It can organize my life, manipulate me, strangle me—to the point where nothing else matters, nobody touches this. When that

happens, Christ takes second place. I don't listen, I don't hear his invitation or his command: to give it all up or only half, to care and to share, to let go. The radical Jesus poses a perennial question: What rules my life? Who is king of my heart?

On the other hand, the moderate Jesus fixes my eye on something splendidly positive. I mean the gift I have in anything I possess, anything I "own." Ultimately, whatever is mine (save for sin) is God's gift. Even if it stems from my own fantastic talent, that talent itself owes its origin to God. But a gift of God is not given to be clutched; it is given to be given. The idea is summed up in a thrilling verse from the First Letter of Peter: All Christians should employ (literally, "deacon") the many-splendored charisms they have from God for the advantage of one another, "as good stewards of God's dappled grace" (1 Pet 4:10).

Therein lies the glory of our gifts, therein its Christian possibilities. The theology I have amassed through half a century is not merely *my* theology, packed away in my personal gray matter for my private delight. It is meant to be shared, at times even refuted—if you dare! Each of you is a gifted woman or man—gifted in more ways perhaps than your modesty will admit. It matters not what your specific possessions are: millions or the widow's mite, intelligence or power, beauty or wisdom, faith and hope and love, gentleness and compassion—whatever. What the moderate Jesus tells you is to use your gifts as he invites or commands you. To some he may say: Give away all you have and come, follow me. To others: Share what you possess; use it for your sisters and brothers. Remember, your most precious possession is yourself. Give it away…lavishly.

III

This suggests my third point. Let's turn Luke's woes around, rephrase them for today. It could be a profound experience, might even disclose what sort of Christians you and I are.

It's true, in Georgetown the radical Jesus might still say baldly: Woe to you who are rich in money, because you profit from a sinful social structure. Woe to you who are rich in intelligence, because you waste it like the prodigal or use it only to make megabucks. Woe to you who are rich in time, because you squander it in self-pity or to get "bombed." Woe to you who are well-fed, because you are "a privileged part of the way food is unequally spread among humans."3 Woe to you who are filled, because you rarely experience your own emptiness. Woe to you who laugh, because you joy not in the gifts of the Spirit, you joy in what you have made of yourself.

But I would rather turn the woes around. Blessed, fortunate, happy4 are you who are rich, rich in money or power, in talent or time, because you can do so much for the poor, can lift the yoke of the oppressed. But blessed only if you have the mind of the poor, the mind of Christ. Only if you recognize that you may not do what you will with what you have. Only if you realize that you are stewards, that whatever you "own" you hold in trust. Only if you employ your power for peace, your wisdom to reconcile, your knowledge to open horizons, your compassion to heal, your hope to destroy despair.

Blessed, fortunate, happy are you who are full now, who are sleek and well-fed, because you are strong enough to feed the hungry, to touch empty stomachs with compassion. But blessed only if you have the mind of the hungry, the mind of Christ. Only if you do not take your food for granted. Only if you are uncomfortable as long as one sister or brother cries in vain for bread or justice or love. Only if you experience your own emptiness—

how desperately you need the hungry, how far you still are from God. Blessed are the full, if you are always hungry.

Blessed are you who laugh now, because you can bring the joy of Christ to others, to those whose days are woven of tears. But blessed only if you can laugh at yourselves, if you don't take yourselves too seriously, if human living doesn't revolve around you and your needs, your hiatus hernia and your latest rebuff. Only if you take delight in all God's creation, in snow and star, in blue marlin and robin redbreast, in Rodin and Dolly Parton and Veal francaise, in the love of man or maid, in the presence of the Trinity within you. Only if laughter means that you let go—let go of all that shackles you to yesterday, to dead hopes, imprisons you in your small selves. Blessed are you, because you are free.

Finally, dare I say "Blessed are you" to the 60 million poor in America, to the billion who will go to bed hungry tonight, to the blacks in D.C. who find it hard to laugh? In some ways, yes. Blessed are you because God loves you, because Christ has a special place in his heart for you. Blessed are you because somehow—I know not how—somehow the blessings of God's kingdom will be yours; sometime—I know not when—sometime you will laugh and leap for joy. Blessed are you because now God alone can fill your emptiness. Blessed are you because you prick my conscience, because you reveal to me my nakedness, my poverty in God's eyes, my borderline Christianity, the way I, like the priest in the Gospel, pass you by "on the other side" (Lk 10:31). Blessed are you because you are living the crucified Christ I so often avoid.

Good friends: Homilies to hundreds can do no more than graze your real-life existence as the gospel touches it. So, it is time for each of us to ask ourselves, to mull over, a bruising, healing question: What are my beatitudes? Blessed am I yes, fortunate indeed ... but why? How would Christ close this sentence to me: "Blessed are you because…"?

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C

By Don L. Fischer

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20; Luke 6:17,20-26

One of the things we are invited to do as followers of Christ is to be filled with great joy and great peace. I think it's easy for us to see that these are gifts we all long for; we don't have to be told we should pursue them. Everyone would like to be filled with joy, praise and thanks for a life that is good. It's interesting to me that Christianity, when seen in its healthiest form, is definitely designed to help us reach that goal of peace and joy. Happiness, wholeness, fullness. But the difficulty we have with this is the way in which we receive these gifts. It is a great mystery. We often seek them too directly and not in the way Jesus has taught us. Let's look at this whole issue of how it is we are to reach the goals that we long for deep inside our souls. How do we reach them? How did Jesus show us the way to reach them? Let's begin by looking at this gospel because it marks a very interesting and very important period in the life of Jesus. He has just spent the night in prayer, on a high mountain. Jesus has turned to his Father and begged him for insight and wisdom as to know whom he could call as his apostles. They were to be his missionaries,

to go out and continue the work.

One of the things that Jesus was extraordinarily sensitive to was that he was called to create in the minds and hearts of people a new way of seeing their religion, their faith, their God. He was coming to save the lost house of Israel. Jesus wasn't going to count on himself to continue this work; rather, he was going to count on a few to start it and continue it - and to let it spread naturally through healthy contagion. People would get "caught" with this teaching Jesus was going to give the twelve disciples. Jesus chooses the twelve, and he comes down from the mountain to a level place. This idea of a "level place" is an interesting metaphor for Jesus to choose to preach this very important sermon. A level place on an incline is certainly a place of rest. He wants to talk to his disciples about how in this process they are going to find help, rest, and comfort. Now if this is considered to be one of the first official homilies or preaching to the disciples, it's a very fascinating beginning. It's almost as if Jesus said, "Okay, now let me get something straight at the very beginning. This is very important. If you don't get this teaching down, you are going to have a really hard time embracing the way I am going to teach you." Jesus starts off by saying the most bizarre things. He looks at his disciples and says, "If you feel poor, if you sense a feeling of poverty, (which I think is another way of saying 'if you feel you are not enough for this task,') you are so blessed. If you feel hungry, (meaning if you don't find that the way I am inviting you to work and live is going to sustain, fill and nourish you) if you are going to go into this situation and expect yourself to be filled all the time and not hungry and not longing for something, you are also very blessed. You have to know that you have to experience hunger. You are not always going to be fulfilled." Then Jesus goes on to say that if the disciples, who are being sent into the world to do the work, won't make it if they don't expect to be misunderstood, ridiculed and rejected, even treated as outcasts in some people's minds. They are really blessed if they understand this is part of the process. Jesus also says something interesting when he says: "If you can embrace your poverty, your hunger, rejection - if you can accept all of that - then you are going to find fulfillment, riches, wholeness, and acceptance." That's very strange language. It's just backwards. We would think (and I know many of us as Christians have fallen into this trap as I have) that if we give our lives over to Jesus, if we tell Jesus we want to do what he wants us to do, then there is a part of us that expects to be feeling very rich and full. Feeling very capable of everything that needs to be done. And everyone is going to love me. If I am a very good priest then I think everyone is going to say, "Oh, he's a wonderful priest. I love him so much." We often enter into situations with that kind of expectation.

Jesus tells us that if we go into this process thinking that this way of life is going to make us rich, capable and super-strong, and we are going to have a lot of people around us loving and adoring us - we are going to be sad, empty, and poor. And we will not experience joy. What is Jesus saying? I think what Jesus is trying to say is that there is something extraordinarily important about knowing how to get to this place of fullness. And we don't get there by deciding we have to be full on our own. If we want to get to a place of effectiveness, we don't develop our skills so that we can be extraordinarily effective. This is counter to almost every other way in which we work in this world in terms of skill and talents. If we want to be good at something in this world, we have to go out and perfect it. We have to work on it. If we want to be good at doing something, we have to practice at it. We have to discipline ourselves so that we can fine-tune our skill. But in the Christian walk, what is so fascinating is that it all begins with its opposite. Powerlessness. Knowing that we don't have enough to do this work is the beginning of real power. Emptiness. Knowing that we are empty and not capable of taking care of

everything is the beginning of really feeling full. Being able to endure misunderstanding and rejection is the beginning of finding security and peace. What Jesus is trying to say is that this whole Christian way of life is based not in success in the way the world thinks about it. Rather, the whole Christian way of life is based in something quite different: trust. Trust in someone who makes us full. Trust in someone who makes us effective. Trust in someone who gives us a sense of value.

It's interesting that when we enter into this world, we enter as children. We are radically trusting. I can't think of a child who is very young that I have talked to who has ever told me how fabulous Jesus is in their life and how wonderful God's grace is and how it sustains them. No, they project all of that onto all of the adults around them: "My mother is there for me. My mommy and daddy love me. My teachers take care of me. They sustain me. I can't make it without them." And so, we begin with a natural leaning on human beings. Notice in the reading from Jeremiah that we are listening to the prophet speak words that are almost the opposite. They are words a child couldn't comprehend. He is saying that if we trust in our parents, we are doomed, cursed. If we trust in the people around us who are going to take care of us, we will never grow in our spiritual lives. We have to trust in something other than human beings. I think there is a natural progression, where as we grow and develop, there is a kind of disillusionment that comes about trusting in humans. At the same time, it strikes me that as we grow and become age-appropriate for this kind of wisdom to sink into us, we do begin to shift our focus as to where we find our value, our dignity and our strength. The other day I was thinking about the fact that if we have experienced abuse from an adult as a child (especially from a caretaker such as a parent, a teacher or a priest) one of the things that is so devastating about that kind of abuse is that it comes too soon in terms of ripping away a child's support system. The most dangerous thing about adults abusing children is not so much the act in itself (although that is certainly bad enough) but what is so devastating is the way in which it robs the child of the ability to trust. If your trust is damaged as a child with regard to your ability to trust another human being, it is going to be very, very hard for you to trust in God. To trust in anything outside of yourself. So often, abused children or abused people tend to be abusive. That means they are basically out there trying to use people to satisfy their needs or wants. Or to make others the source of their value. It can create a tremendous selfishness that gets really in the way of any kind of real intimacy.

Real intimacy is not based on our needing somebody else as much as it is based on our desire to give to someone else. To share life with someone else. To trust in someone else. Not as our source of strength, but as something quite different. We are invited to imagine that there is a power - divinity - living within us, living around us, living as part of us - that we are to drink in as our source of strength, our source of satisfaction, and our source of boundaries that keep us from being damaged by people who don't understand us. We need to trust in the mysterious way in which the divine power, an extraordinary gift, is our rock. But that doesn't happen when we are really young. It happens when we get older. In the reading from Paul to the Corinthians, he tells the people that unless they believe in the resurrection of the body, they can't believe in the fundamentals of Christianity. It all depends on the understanding that Christ was raised from the dead. I used to think that this meant, "Do we believe in the resurrection. Do we believe it literally happened. Do we believe that his body that went into the tomb came out. Do we believe he was dressed in white. That he spoke to the disciples and the women who came to the tomb?" If we don't believe in that, we don't have any hope or faith. I thought, "Well, that seems strange." But it's not about just believing in the literal resurrection of Jesus, which I truly believe in. It is more than that. It is about believing in the process.

The process of Jesus' dying and rising is an invitation for us to believe in the process we find described in the gospel. That is simply: In dying, we rise. In letting go of the need to be rich and full from the things around us, we become truly rich and full. The act of dying and rising is the same action. This is difficult to explain. If we have ever met anyone very selfish, very egotistical, and very caught up in the things they have accomplished, we can discern that those people are basically living in this world without ever experiencing death. They don't know anything about the dark side of this whole process of how they get to a place that makes them extraordinarily effective with other people. Nothing is more difficult than working with someone who is trying to give you something, but you have to constantly have to honor them as the gift-giver. You constantly have to give them affirmation for the wonderful things they are doing. Otherwise, they lose hope. That's a good indication that they don't believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. They don't believe that it is out of their poverty that they are strong or rich. They don't believe in the basic paradox. This idea of the death and resurrection of Jesus is not a mystery of our faith; it is described as the mystery of our faith. If we don't understand this, then nothing makes sense. So often people will blame God or become angry when things don't go the way they want, when things are taken away from them that they really depend on for their value. They will see God as mean and nasty, ugly and horrible. Unfaithful. After all, they say, "If I have done what I am supposed to do, why don't I get what I need?" And yet, so many times what we are looking at is God gently trying to break that tie to things that are not really fundamentally the source of our strength, our value, our richness - whatever you want to call it. It's got to be based on something other than how things are going on the outside, our relationships.

The challenge of the Christian walk, the challenge to find this incredible gift of peace, is all in this area of dying. Of believing in our powerlessness. Of believing in the inability of the world to really satisfy us. When things go wrong, we sense that we have been dumped by God. When we are caught in that way of thinking, it blocks everything. It blocks the growth. It blocks the movement. Our challenge is to embrace this great mystery of death and resurrection. When Jesus came into the world in the incarnation (and Christianity is fundamentally incarnational) we are looking at a figure who is not just simply walking this earth as a sign that God is curious and interested in our lives down here. Rather, it is someone who is trying to show us what it is like to be human. There is nothing clearer about the life of Jesus, particularly when he did good, life-giving things for people, that there was another group ready to kill him. Especially after he had won the awe and admiration of the crowd. Do you think that was just an experience Jesus had, as if we don't have that experience, too? We always have that experience. Just imagine how limiting it is when that kind of negative reaction is seen as something that is wrong, when, in fact, it is inevitable. If it is inevitable, we have to be strong enough to deal with it. The way we become strong enough to deal with it is to shift dramatically from a kind of childlike dependence on the environment and the people around us for our sustenance to something that is much bigger. Much more consistent. And fundamentally designed to be the one and only source that really sustains us and brings us this gift of peace.