



St Mary's  
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City



## Were You There?

Children and the Violence of the Crucifixion

Maureen Swinger

**"I walked the other way.** I didn't want my kids to see." My friends were discussing a recent family trip to El Salvador that coincided with Holy Week. They had encountered a procession carrying a statue of Jesus after he was taken down from the cross, and the figure was completely drenched in red paint.

Knowing that my friends were agnostic and perhaps unfamiliar with the Easter story, I felt compelled to point out that Jesus' death *was* bloody, and that churches across the globe find different ways of commemorating his suffering. They acknowledged this, but... "How would you explain such a sight to your children?"

I imagined how the procession must have appeared to my friend – a gory drama -depicting an event that she doubts ever happened. Putting my thoughts into coherent order at the moment when they're actually needed has never been my strong suit, but I tried:

"I don't know how I would explain this to my children. It would depend on the questions they would ask. A bleeding statue would startle any child who has been blessed enough to land in a safe home. But how young is too young to grieve for all innocents who die unjustly, in El Salvador, in Syria, or on a hill outside Jerusalem?"

"At some point my children do need to know that innocent bodies bleed and die on our earth, every day. They have never seen violence, real or representative. My husband and I try to talk about suffering in a way that they can take into their hearts without sinking under it. But this sight goes deeper, because we believe that Jesus is real. He did die, and he did live, and that story is the single greatest truth we can pass on to our children."

The conversation ended there, partly because one of those very children hurled himself into our presence, loudly in need of a nap. But that evening, as I tucked the same little boy into bed again, and he was reeling off a roll of all the people he wanted God to remember, I realized that much of what I ought to have said was only then shaping into thought.

I know how the Easter story affected me as a child – viscerally. I remember the solemn quiet of the adults surrounding me – our community's old tradition of keeping Good Friday as a silent day of rest.

I remember standing before a large print of Matthias Grünewald's *Crucifixion*, my fingers contracting in ghost pain as I saw those agonizingly contorted hands nailed to the crosspiece.

**The empty tomb would mean**

**nothing if there were not first  
darkness and death.**

I remember hearing the broken weeping of the strings in the opening bars of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*. I remember singing the old spiritual, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" The song is a *Via Crucis* by itself, every step causing me to tremble. The version we sing stops at the tomb – it goes no further.

For children who do not yet fully understand the story, these Good Friday traditions are not empty gestures. They remain as symbols in a child's heart until they suddenly become real – the first time we choose consciously to hurt someone, to lie, to betray trust or reject love. Then the patterns live, and we recognize their truth, appearing before we realized our need for it. Tempted to lash out, to dodge the charges or blame someone else, we're instead offered the chance to stop. Be silent. Weep, tremble, and recognize all at once why we need this Jesus: his death, his life.

If we don't know how to grieve, how can the risen Jesus ask us, "Why do you weep?" That sunrise, that empty tomb would mean -precisely nothing if there were not first darkness and death.

That sunrise, incidentally, also has a tradition attached. Just before dawn on Easter Sunday, everyone in our community meets on an open hilltop. We light a bonfire and wait for the sun to lift above the Hudson Highlands. The valley turns gold as the light catches the Shawangunk ridges and the Catskill Mountains beyond. Then the singing begins.

I watch my children watch the sun as we join our voices in the songs of Easter Day, and I think toward them, "One day you will -experience this dawning in your heart, the first time forgiveness finds you, and you realize that because of this rising, you also can be made new."

*Maureen Swinger is an editor at Plough and lives at the Fox Hill Bruderhof in Walden, New York, with her husband Jason and their three children.*

### April-May Parish Diary 2018

- April 22: **Day of Prayer for Vocations**
- April 26: 7:15pm: **Patrick Finn Lecture:**
- April 28: **First Holy Communion: St. Conleth's College**
- May 8: 10:30 -11:30: **Holy Hour for the Protection of Human Life**
- May 13: **The Ascension of the Lord:** World Communications Day
- May 19: **Parish Schools First Holy Communion:**
- May 20: 7:00pm **Concert: Dublin Orchestral Players**
- May 28: **Parish Pastoral Council Meeting**

### OFFICIAL FAMILY PRAYER FOR WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2018

God, our Father, We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son, One family, in the Spirit of your love. Bless us with the joy of love. Make us patient and kind, gentle and generous, welcoming to those in need. Help us to live your forgiveness and peace. Protect all families with your loving care, Especially those for whom we now pray: [We pause and remember family members and others by name]. Increase our faith, Strengthen our hope, Keep us safe in your love, Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share. This we ask, through Christ our Lord, Amen

Mary, mother and guide, pray for us. Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us. Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us. Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us

### Thoughts for a Day

I beg you, wait for God quietly, and don't be so religious. To have nothing to show for yourself and to wait for God is better than to be polishing your piety. You shall not become godless by waiting for God. On the contrary, the truth of God's cause will grow in your heart, and that is all that matters. A true word once in ten years is dearer to God than a daily sermon. It is your genuineness that matters. A single genuine moment has much greater consequences in God's kingdom than a thousand religious practices.

- Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805 – 1880)

Be not forgetful of prayer. Every time you pray, if your prayer is sincere, there will be new feeling and new meaning in it, which will give you fresh courage, and you will understand that prayer is an education. Remember, too, every day and whenever you can, to repeat to yourself, "Lord, have mercy on all who appear before you today." For every hour and every moment thousands of people leave life on this earth, and their souls appear before God....How touching it must be to a soul standing in dread before the Lord to feel at that instant that for him too there is one to pray, that there is a fellow creature left on earth to love him. And God will look on you both more graciously, for if you have had so much pity on him, how much more will He have pity who is infinitely more loving and merciful than you. And He will forgive him for your sake.

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)

### In Memoriam

#### Weekend of 28/29 April

6pm Vigil, Margaret Kearney

11am, Pauline Nealon

**Masses on 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> May 2018.**

6pm, John and Elizabeth Lynch (Anniversary)

### Masses and Confession

**Sundays:** Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

-**Rosary** daily after 10am mass

**Adoration Blessed Sacrament,** Weds 10.30-12.40

### Church Collections

**W/e 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018**

1<sup>st</sup> Collection: €1,076

2<sup>nd</sup> Collection: €1,510 (Vocations)

Weekday collections: €785

### THANK YOU

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Child Protection: <http://www.stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie/ministries/child-protection/> also [www.cpsps.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.cpsps.dublindiocese.ie)

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