



HAIL

REFLECTIONS ON THE
MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

MARY

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THINGS FALL APART

The great Irish poet William Butler Yeats in his celebrated poem, "The Second Coming", prophesied: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.' Hopefully, the journey of the life of faith gradually teaches us all how true that is. As individuals and as members of institutions we simply cannot deny or avoid these moments of 'disintegration' when 'things fall apart'.

Each person (and maybe even our Church at times) has to face the 'agony in the garden' and there is never any clearcut rational way through these trials. Often the best one can do is to simply 'cling to the rock' like Jesus in Gethsemane and trust despite our emotional distress.

For it is in times of greatest humiliation that we come to real and true depth of soul. When we feel shame or powerlessness, or when we are being abused and cannot defend ourselves, we are certainly vulnerable to despair. But it is precisely through such humiliating times that we can grow deeper in compassion, graciousness and forgiveness, and not fall deeper into hate, anger and revenge.

I have found very helpful in my inner journey the reflections of a German theologian, Dorothee Sölle. In the context of a major crisis in her life (divorce) she experienced what it means to survive 'death' in the middle of life and to overcome the complete destruction of one's plans and goals.

You can feel her pain as she writes:

At that time I went to church to pray. But to say that I prayed, seems all wrong now. I was a single scream. I screamed for help and help for me meant either one of two things: my husband returns to me or that I die so that the pain finally ends. Then—in the midst of my screaming—I remembered a word from the Bible: 'My grace is sufficient for you' ... I could not relate to the word 'grace' because my life nowhere resembled a graceful state. But God

had 'told' me things fall apart precisely this word. I left the church and from then on I no longer prayed for my husband to return. (For a long time I continued to pray for death.) I began—in a very small way—to accept that my husband was gone. God did not comfort me but threw me face-down to the ground. I would rather have died. Later I noticed that the encounter with God was for many people bruising. Already Jacob began to limp after he fought with an angel (Genesis 32).

When we pray the Rosary and reflect on the First Sorrowful Mystery, Jesus' Agony in the Garden, we see how Jesus, our brother, totally shared in our similar struggles. Jesus experienced how the encounter with God can be both terrifying and 'bruising'.

According to eminent Dominican biblical scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor, Mark the Evangelist, in his Gospel account, is telling us that Jesus really and fully 'broke down' before the greatest crisis of his life. After all, it is a human thing to have a nervous breakdown if you are about to be tortured to death. This was no make-believe play acting. Jesus was 'falling apart' emotionally.

Some Christians do not like the idea of Jesus having a nervous breakdown, of him being 'out of control'. But personally I find it a great consolation. For our faith as Christians challenges us to accept the human frailty of Jesus, as well as his divine nature.

Even (perhaps especially) when 'things fall apart' he is our brother and God, our Emmanuel, sharing our lot with us in loving solidarity.



Ponder...

Recall a time when things have fallen apart in your life. Can you identify the ways you managed to 'cling to the rock' of your faith? Did Jesus' Gethsemane experience provide a 'touchstone' for you? If so, how?

Jesus' humanity was at its most vulnerable during his agony in the garden - to the point of total breakdown. And yet he was never spiritually alone. How can this experience and knowledge inform you in your next time of crisis?

Our faith as Christians challenges us to accept the human frailty of Jesus as well as his divine nature. Take some quiet time to talk to Jesus about this paradox. Ask for a deeper appreciation, understanding and awareness of his omnipresence with you, especially when 'things fall apart'.



IF YOU WANT

If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy, and say,
"I need shelter for the night,
please take me inside your heart, my time is so close."
Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the sublime intimacy,
the divine, the Christ, taking birth forever,
as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God, each of us.
Yes there, under the dome of your being
does creation come into existence eternally,
through your womb, dear pilgrim – the sacred womb of your soul,
as God grasps our arms for help:
for each of us is his beloved servant, never far.
If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the street
pregnant with Light and sing.

—St John of the Cross