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## Simple thoughts in Holy Week

The peace I really long for is better known as acceptance and the shortest way home to acceptance is to pray for the gift of gratitude, naming the gifts I'm grateful for



By [Michael Kelly SJ](#) | [Australia](#)

Lent is as we know the big time in the life of the Christian community when we focus on the invitation Jesus makes to us to repent – to be converted.

But what actually does conversion mean? What are the signs we should look for in our conversion? What **gifts and graces** should we pray for as we seek conversion?

These questions are especially important as we get closer to the pivotal feasts of the Christian year when we celebrate the essence of our faith - the Passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

But I find in my life that I can miss the very events, experiences and developments that are themselves the first moments of conversion.

What are they? At the simplest and most direct level, they are what we face at the start of every Mass – our selfishness, our self-absorption and our constant prioritizing of our wishes and desires over those of others.

What would putting them to one side look like? They would create a whole new world which, if persevered with, becomes the full flowering of the transformation Jesus invites us to when he says to his followers "Repent and believe the good news!"

The early and simple version in our response will have us spend more time in prayer, do more to attend to the needs of those we know are suffering various afflictions, examine our consciences more thoroughly and make extra efforts to support the material needs of those we know are deprived.

But these all come down to things that we do. Commendable as these worthy and genuine efforts may be, they are efforts by us that owe little to the energy and initiative of God. And real, lasting and effective "conversion" is the work of God who initiates the process and brings it to completion.

But to see conversion that way really takes the experience being helpless and deprived of any resources for transformation that then allows us to look to God as the transforming redeemer.

We don't need to be threatened with the prospect of being martyred to appreciate what that can be. Actually, all of us at different times in our lives know exactly what that emptiness is like.

Any and all experiences of "unplanned losses" can trigger these experiences that bring grief, anger and usually depression too.

It can be relationship break up and separation, job loss, the destruction of equilibrium or a sense of direction and confidence in it that comes the loss of basic resources like good health. It happens when people we have come to rely on simply disappear at just the time their support is needed.

## **A relationship with the God who promises us joy in abundance if we ask**

It happens when any one of the essential pillars to an effective and successful life – in relationships, in bodily functions, professional capacities and operations simply cease or

become dysfunctional.

It happens when illness and bodily frailty prevent us assuming all the things we have regularly done about our resilience and robust good health that allows adaptation and endurance of physical challenges.

And what is "it"? The emptiness, and the depression that can come with knowing our luck has run out, our game is over, our resources are spent and we don't know what the next will be.

These are the dark and dismal places in our lives that should not occur too often. But a human life without them is a most unusual thing and without them, we will lead superficial lives devoid of the experience that makes our empathy and compassion for others possible.

What are we to do? What on earth might we find in the stories and personalities of this time in the Christian year – Holy Week – to illuminate these experiences that are what old time spiritual guides used to call our "share in the Cross of Jesus"?

What is to be done? And if we are Christian and have a relationship with the God who promises us joy in abundance if we ask, what are we to do to trigger flow of that goodness?

This is what I do: the first thing is to accept that nothing can happen if I am not ready to fall silent for some time – silent so I can hear the still, silent voice of the Spirit at the core of my being inviting me to the place of contemplative stillness where God's Spirit can have a say in my life.

The next thing is to be honest and find out what I really need and usually it is peace - the pervasive and presence filled calm that lifts me from the driven, self-absorbed often panic filled state of disturbance that can wreck my core being and keep me away from God.

The next step is to name what I really want from God - the gift I can't will into life on my own to appear for me.

Then I let go into the emptiness of the knowledge that the desired outcome is beyond me to create, that I may well be kidding myself about God's loving care.

Then I just listen.

After long waiting and once I have still the insistent clamor that indignation, anger or any number of discordant emotions can stir, I often move to the simple exercise of counting my blessings.

Reflecting on it afterwards, I always come back to the same things – the peace I really long for is better known as acceptance and the shortest way home to acceptance is to pray for the

gift of gratitude, naming the gifts I'm grateful for.

This will be my prayer on Good Friday.

**Father Michael Kelly SJ** *is the Director of Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News).*