

Sacred Suffering
by Elizabeth Leon

In the fall of 2016, God gave me a vision. I am very uncomfortable with that word; I assure you it is only with a deep sense of humility that I use it. But, I was recently reminded that in our baptism, we are each anointed as priest, prophet, and king. It is in this spirit that I share the following inspirations the Lord gave me, convinced they are not meant only for myself.

These words have formed the foundation of my healing. I go to them again and again. I cling to them and the intimacy and comfort they offer in the face of fear, loss, pain, and suffering. I hope it is possible they might do the same for some of you.

You know my pain, Jesus, 100 times, infinity times more than me. I want to crawl up on that cross with you. I drag a stepladder over the dirt and mud and I stand looking up at you on the cross, so dirty and bloody and scorned and rejected. Beaten, despised, hated. I feel the splintered sharp rough wood of your cross, the sun beating down on me, your head and crown of thorns casting a shadow on me so I can see your face. Your eyes meet mine. "Come, little one," you say to me. I start to cry and shake. I look down at the pathetic small wound I carry in my hand, my skin still pure and white against the crusted blood of your sores. I stand below you, one hand on my stepladder, your feet out of reach still. As I look up, I can see into the wound at your side. Can see all the way into the eternity of your sacred bleeding beating heart, blood and water forming a puddle at my feet, a track of clean skin down your abdomen, a few drops still hanging underneath your open side. Eternity beating in your heart, slower slower. Every pulse pushing agony through your veins.

Slowly I put my feet on the steps of my ladder and lift myself higher -- one hand clasped around the orb of pain that consumed me moments before is nothing as I stand at your feet. I open my palm and see my pain and it is real and it is a blessed broken wound, ragged flesh that is tearing at me; both of me and not of me; something of my soul and my own heart flesh, but I clasp it in my hand almost embarrassed at its nothingness as I stand in the presence of your agony. I hear your breath, a gurgle and a hum, your struggle to fill your beautiful lungs with the smog of humanity, the charred air of earth burning your perfect purity.

I close my hand and climb slowly until I can touch your feet, your toes so dirty, so scratched and worn, my King and my God. I weep as I press my face against them, the metal of the nail burns my face from the sun, from the radiance of your burning holiness coursing through it. I kiss the blood and just hold your feet, wrap my arms around your cross. The skin on your arch -- no place without a wound or a tear or scrape or slash or cut. I feel the heart of our Mother... a flash

of your perfectly smooth baby feet, chubby perfect legs kicking up at her from your cradle, her hands squeezing your thighs. Jesus, my Jesus.

I climb higher, placing my free hand on your knees. Your thighs. Reverently. Unworthily. Your eyes on mine the whole time, love radiating into my heart, knowing that if the eternity of the world and my own heart weren't at stake that you would wrap me in your arms. I see those muscles tensed and taut, stretched so painfully tight along your holy altar, the crossbeam of salvation. I reach the top of my stepladder and balance there, seeing the valley of tears stretched behind you -- both a wasteland and an Eden. A call of birds in my ear. The wind. But otherwise, only the beating of your heart. I am frozen in the glory of your cross.

I stand with my hand just below your chest, breathless and broken at the witness of your pain, your skin cut open and weeping for me everywhere I look. There is no spot left untouched in love for me, my family, every brother and sister on this holy earth -- a temple because your feet walked on it. I lift my eyes to yours again. I love you I'm sorry I love you I'm sorry thank you forgive me... a litany pouring from my mouth. So humbled and nothing in the glory of what you have done, and yet you allow me to come and bring just a little bit more pain. You have called me, encouraged me, beckoned me deep in my soul. I don't want to. It's not right. It's not fair. You don't smile, but I see the slightest twinkle in your eye as you think of Peter rebelling too. It is the way, you tell me. My way for you and my love for the world.

So, I press on and balance and reach for you, my wound, my own pathetic ball of flesh and blood pulsing warm and broken in my hand. I place my hand gingerly on your ribs for balance. My Lord, my God. And I look to you again. I know I am already hurting you. I don't want to hurt you anymore. I notice this close that there are millions of wounds, countless, infinite... and there is a name on each one. I see my name over and over and I almost fall as I realize how often I have hurt you, scarred you, in my sin. A splinter pierces my hand as I grab your cross for balance. I see a drop of my blood trickle down and I look to you again. Come, my little one, you call. I place my bloody palm against your ribs again to reach and my blood mingles with yours. Your pain surges through my body in a breathless contraction, not staying but gathering my blood to be purified in yours. I am startled and shaken and at the same time see just the tiniest sliver of your great mystery. I know why you have called me. My hand burns with holy fire but it is yours, your pain you have allowed me to carry. Come, my little one. My hand still bleeds, but it is transformed. It is your blood I carry somehow. I have the tiniest flash of understanding that comes and goes. Your love radiates around me, though, pulses in the air in the holy aroma of your blood, the broken flesh crying praise. I give you my heart again in my eyes, my

litany of love pouring forth from my lips -- and in one final stretch on my toes I reach my hand holding my own pulsing pain and before I can convince myself not to, I slide it into the hole in your side, pressing it tight into the broken bleeding flesh of your heart. I know this is agony for you. I know that it why you called me here. My hand stays there pressed flat. I feel the heat of your heart burning holy fire, the pressure of your ribs, the smooth bloody fascia. I do not belong here. I am hurting you. I am so selfish to give you more pain because I couldn't carry this one small pathetic grief. You are covered in grief and I couldn't carry one small bit. I sob my love for you, my sorrow. I press my cheek against your chest, my other hand around your cross, reaching and stretching to be yours, your knees pressing into my stomach. I want to stay right here, pouring my broken heart into yours. I ache to feel your hand on my head, your hand on my cheek. I press every drop of love I have onto you knowing that I am doing nothing but adding to your pain. Eternity beats in my ear against your chest. Slowly praising you and thanking you, I slide my hand out of your side, having left my wound in your Sacred Heart. I press my holy, bloody hand to my heart, to my cheek; I kiss your mercy. Your love. Your blood now left on my lips. I know in some way my presence here consoles you. I have added to your pain, increased your burden because I was too weak, too broken. I know too that you do this for love. For love of me. That I can come again with another handful of throbbing, soul-aching flesh and you will allow me to climb and press it into your heart. That you will keep carrying it for me. And that each time I come face-to-face with your agony and weep over your suffering and pour forth gratitude from my lips -- each time I am changed and you are strengthened. My pain doesn't leave, but it becomes your pain...pain borne in love, in love for the world, with surrender to the Lord. My hand hurts and is scarred, but I touch those scars with reverence. I kiss your chest and knees and feet on my way down, pressing my forehead again against your bony beautiful toes. Let me stay, I pray. But I know the answer. I feel your radiance on me as I step to earth, my feet landing in the merciful puddle of your blood and water. I smile, I beam at you. I am peaceful. I am more whole than I have ever been. My hands are open and free -- both scarred now, both carrying on my skin the marks of your love. My hope is knowing I can run here again, fly to you a million times over and you will never tire. I can trust in the redemption of your suffering for the wounds I have caused you and others and the wounds they cause me. You will never leave me. You are held there on the cross still for me, for all of humanity, and at the same time, you walk glorified beside me, lifting me into the air, tossing me laughing like the child I am by your side. As I walk away from Calvary, I turn back and I see the line stretching farther than I can see of each other soul who has run to you in their sadness and suffering and want. You will never fail us, our dearest Jesus. May our praise and thanksgiving never fail you.

In a moment of clarity, you show me that this flesh of pain I had in my hand, that was a living pulsing grief and suffering, that felt like at any moment it might consume me, overcome me -- that it was your heart. That's why you have called me to ascend Calvary and climb my step-ladder and wrap my arms around your splintered cross and broken body. You have given me a piece of your sacred heart, your suffering pierced, bruised, rejected, betrayed, unloved, forgotten, unwelcomed, brutalized heart. You placed it in my hand. You placed it in my life. YOU TRUSTED ME WITH IT. You trusted me to hold it, weep over it, weep with it, for it, to worship it, recognize it and climb this lonely painful hill to find you and praise and adore you. To console you as I place this piece of your flesh within your heart once again. You become more whole, less broken, when I slip my hand holding the treasure of pain and suffering into your pierced side, when I weep and grope and gently, reverently and with the greatest love I have ever known, place my sacred suffering -- my piece of your sacred heart -- back into the dying, pulsing heart in your chest. I leave it and I leave you, bathed in blood and grace. Broken and scarred but healed and ready to hold again the treasure of your pain.