

## Honest To God

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On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ...From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.  
—*John 6:60, 66, NIV*

We avoid Lent and Holy Week because it isn't a happy and uplifting time—but to be honest, neither is most of life. Sometimes we come to church all scrubbed up, dressed nicely, with smiles on our faces, and when people ask how we are, we reply that everything is fine and we even boast how wonderful things are—but it is all a lie. Life is not always uplifting, or wonderful, or pleasant, or joyous—but we have been taught the lie that for spiritual people like us, it must be so. So we become play actors, hypocrites—telling ourselves that by lying, we are having faith, and that if we lie enough, the bad things will fade away, like a dream upon awakening.

But in this we miss the whole point of the incarnation! God became flesh in Jesus Christ. Jesus faced temptation, He suffered hunger and thirst, He suffered the agony of crucifixion. Jesus our God did not face these things so that we would be exempt from them, He faced these things so that we would have dignity in them.

We think ourselves so modern and enlightened when we read of lepers walking through crowds, crying out "Unclean, unclean!" so that others could avoid touching them and thus protect themselves from ritual impurity. We tell ourselves we would do no such thing, but we do the same thing! When a person in our society becomes sad, or depressed, or out of sorts—our modern form of social leprosy—they cry out, "I want to be alone, I want to be alone." In truth, they want company, but they tell people to go away to avoid rejection and to make it easier to restore relationships when they are feeling chipper again. We laugh when we remember the days when people dressed to the nines for church and stayed home when their attire wasn't fancy enough, but we stupidly do the same thing with our emotions. We stay away when our emotions aren't presentable.

Yet when Jesus came in the flesh and dwelt among us, and suffered hunger and thirst and heat and cold and betrayal and loneliness, and

finally also pain and agony and death upon the cross, He gave dignity to His little ones who suffer. He gave dignity to us! Everyone avoids a sad person, except Jesus Himself who is much acquainted with sorrow. Jesus was the only person who gave the demoniac of the Gadarenes his dignity, the only one who could exorcise him. Jesus faced the man who lived in a cemetery, naked and screaming all day and night and calmed his spirit and healed his soul. How can you think that this same Jesus would be repelled by your pessimism or your cynicism or your sadness or your grief? How could a man who seeks the company of demoniacs be repelled by you?

The people of this world believe in the power of positive thinking and in happiness, and in believing these things, they are very shrewd. For people of this world have only the present moment, and if they are unhappy in it, they have lost something. But we who are Christians can endure unhappiness and sadness and loneliness and backstabbing and betrayal and friendlessness and poverty and hunger and thirst; we can face mourning and grief and even death, because Jesus faced all those things. As Christians, we know that Jesus' suffering was His way to glory, and his Crucifixion was the door to His Resurrection. We know that He ascended on high and sits, alive and well, at the right hand of His Father, where He rules over all things. We can face our own crucifixions in life, because we know that we will share in His Resurrection on the Last Day!

On Palm Sunday, there were crowds who cheered Jesus as the King, but where were all those fair-weather friends when Jesus prayed in agony on Gethsemane, and where were they when He hung upon the cross?

Therefore, let us show that we as Christians are not just Jesus' groupies, we are His friends. Let us be bold to join Him, fasting in the wilderness for forty days during Lent; let us be bold to pray with Him in the garden on Maundy Thursday, let us fearlessly stand at the foot of His cross on Good Friday, so that we may witness His Resurrection and His Ascension, and join in His triumphant reign. And on that Last Day, when Jesus brushes away the groupies, let us be among His true friends, whom He welcomes into His glory.

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