

Lent 2024, Week 6 Reflection

ABANDONMENT AND DEVOTION

Welcome to the Sixth (and final) Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Somehow, we have arrived at Holy Week. As we conclude our series and make final preparations for Easter, recall the beginning of this Lenten season: Where were you on Ash Wednesday? What were you carrying that First Sunday in Lent? How have things shifted? Take a moment to sense yourself beheld by the loving gaze of God, as we reflect on “Abandonment and Devotion.” This week’s reflection was written by Lindsay Moore, an alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Washington, DC...

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“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” we cry in this week’s responsorial psalm. But for me, the question that pours out from our Gospel readings is not in what ways God has abandoned *us*, but rather in what ways *we* abandon God?

The scripture readings for this week offer us multiple examples of abandonment: Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. Pilate eschews his duty and hands Jesus over for crucifixion. The crowds swap their jubilant shouts of “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” for cries of “Crucify Him!”

Perhaps the greatest example of abandonment, though, comes from Peter. Peter’s denial of Jesus comes when both are, in effect, on trial. Mark’s Gospel interweaves Jesus’s trial with Peter’s: But where Jesus speaks truth when confronted with falsehoods, Peter utters falsehoods when confronted with truth. Peter fails his “trial” and is spared his life. Jesus passes His trial and is condemned to death.



“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” by Walter Watzpatzkowski is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/).

This abandonment starts with Peter earnestly proclaiming his faithfulness, but then reneging on this within hours. Peter says, “Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be.” He goes on to say to Jesus, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.”

A short twenty-three lines later, Peter is warming himself by the fire in the high priest’s courtyard, the only disciple to follow Jesus and his captors. There, he is discovered by a maid of the high priest, who sees Peter and says, “You, too, were with the Nazarene Jesus.” Peter denies it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” She pursues Peter further and tells others, “This man [Peter] is one of them.” Again, Peter protests. “Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean,” says the bystander. Peter begins to curse and swear, “I



do not know this man about whom you are talking.” When the cock crows, Peter breaks down and weeps.

How could Peter do this? Peter, who *knew* Jesus, who witnessed His ministry and miracles, and who was so often set apart by Jesus, abandons Him on the very night when Jesus is handed over to death. Peter had just hours earlier stood before the living man of Jesus, assuring Him of his unwavering faith and commitment. Peter even follows Jesus into a dangerous situation -- surely a sign of his devotion. And yet, he abandons Jesus.

In his denial, Peter very likely saves himself. If he had answered affirmatively, he likely would have been put to death, too. So does that mean denying Jesus was the right thing to do? No. But through Peter, we learn that we can err in our abandonment of God but still draw closer to God through our transgressions. In Peter’s case, God eventually uses him to do nothing less than build the foundation of His Church.

On Good Friday, we are reminded that we must confront our abandonment of God and return to Him by choice. Since becoming a Christian, I have shouted my “Hosannas.” I have, like Peter, earnestly assured God that I would follow Him. But I have also shouted, “Crucify Him!” I see myself in Pilate’s abdication of responsibility. I hear my voice in Peter’s denials. My lips perform Judas’s kiss.

So who will you be this Good Friday? What will you be shouting from the crowd? Will it be “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord?” or will it be “Crucify Him!”?

Whatever your answer, God is calling you closer to Him. On this Good Friday, we must prepare ourselves to enter fully into the joy of the risen Christ, which is coming. Let us reflect on those times when we abandon God, consciously or unconsciously. Let us turn our cries from, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” into an honest look at the ways *we* abandon *Him*. And finally, let us pray that we grow closer to God through honesty, humility, and truth, so that we might stand like the Centurion and exclaim, “This man truly is the son of God!” and fully rejoice in Christ’s return.

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Thank you for sharing your Lenten season with us. We hope this retreat has enriched your prayer and reflection. From all of us at Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality, we wish you and yours a blessed Holy Week, Easter, and beyond.

Reflection questions:

- *In what ways have you abandoned God?*
 - *What small change would you have to make in your life today to more fully celebrate Jesus’s return and resurrection?*
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Opening & Closing Prayers

On Joy and Sorrow by Kahlil Gibran

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

Beannacht / Blessing by John O'Donohue

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when your eyes
freeze behind
the grey window
and the ghost of loss
gets into you,
may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green
and azure blue,
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the currach of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be
yours.

And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.