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In St. John's account of the passion and death of Jesus the way the events unfold is always under Jesus' control. He is in charge: He tells the disciples where they will celebrate the Passover; he takes control of the encounter with the soldiers and guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees; he tells Simon Peter to put back his sword after he cuts off the ear of high priest's slave; he ends up questioning the high priest and then Pilate rather than the other way around—the list goes on.

Very clearly St. John wants to convey to us that Jesus has fully embraced the unfolding events. He sees them as intimately connected with the purpose for which he came. To the saying we normally hear at Christmas “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” you could add the ending “to share with us our suffering.”

That sharing in itself makes all the difference. With the incarnation of the Son of God into our world, we have to say good-bye to any notion we might hold of a God who is indifferent, who keeps his distance, who does not really know what it's like to be in this world of finitude and diminished by sin.

We have not yet reached the moment in our Holy Three days when the theme shifts to the new life of the resurrection, so we have time to ponder this aspect of our salvation: God comes to us where we are and shares with us what we are going through. Whether

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that's due to our own folly or whether we are the innocent victims of natural events or someone else's actions, God does not discriminate. Jesus shows by his embrace of the suffering that comes to him that he chooses to be there with us in the midst of human suffering in general

In the midst of this pandemic, with the repercussions of it still unfolding, there is a lot of speculation as to why this is happening. Ultimately, we cannot know the mind of God. We can only seek his will.

It is true that we have to practice prudence and follow what science tells us is a prudent response to an event of this nature. But the deeper reality is that God is present with us in the midst of it. He suffers with us in it, has com-passion for us.

God has already proven his nature. In the person of Jesus he has made himself known in definitive fashion: Jesus did not balk at suffering—his own or that of others. That's who he is.

That presents to us the question of how we manage our own encounter with suffering. Many of us who were trained in Catholic schools were encouraged to “offer it up,” to identify our suffering as joined with his. That's still good advice.

Beyond that we can also share in the suffering of Christ by showing compassion, by being willing to

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share in the suffering of others—the ones we can help and even the ones we can't. All of that is in union with Christ, the one who came into this world of suffering and made it his own by his willing embrace of the suffering and death that came his way.

Christ's willing embrace of the suffering of this world is the example to follow, now and always. It's how we take up our cross daily and follow him into fullness of life with God.