

In St. Matthew's account of the Passion and Death of Christ, Jesus is found praying with great intensity at two key moments at the end of his life: In the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his death and on Golgotha on a Friday afternoon, the day of his death. What these two rather somber incidents have in common is the terrible silence of God.

In the Garden of Gethsemane we are told that Jesus grew sorrowful and dismayed" (Mt. 26:38). His impending Passion brought him to his knees. Matthew writes, "He fell upon his knees in prayer" (Mt. 26:39). No fewer than three times does Jesus pray earnestly that the cup of suffering by him by if it is God's holy will. Compounding his agony was the response, or lack thereof, of three of his disciples. Jesus was left alone. "The separation of Jesus from three of his disciples", writes biblical scholar Raymond Brown," portrays symbolically that he has no support--- the sleep of the disciples portrays their un-readiness to face the trial".

Jesus' request was not granted. God, his Father, rejected it. Truth to tell, his true passion was God's silence.

On the cross, Jesus somehow managed to pray. He turned to the Psalms. IN the tragic drama, Jesus has been abandoned by his close friends, his disciples, and mocked by all who have come to the cross. The scribes and Pharisees taunted Him: "He trusted in God. Let God, if he favors him, aid him now" (Mt. 27:43). Those who witnessed a crucifixion would never forget the screams and pain, the wild curses and the out breaking of despair of the tragic victims. Darkness has indeed covered the earth. There is nothing that shows God acting on the side of Jesus. The questioning of Jesus of the one he calls "my God", is understandable in view of his hideous suffering. "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt. 27:46). It is a desperate cry for help.

An answer from heaven was not forthcoming.

But let us bear in mind that in his dying moments, Jesus is praying the great Psalm of suffering Israel. Calling God "my God", implies trust. He speaks to God like a child to his father. Jesus does not simply acknowledge the absence of God but turns it into a prayer! (Ratzinger)

Jesus identifies himself with all those who suffer under God's silence. He is in union with all those who suffer unjustly, with the whole of Israel and with all of suffering humanity. He suffers in fellowship with us and for us. Since he is praying, he cannot have lost hope!

In Elie Wiesel's classic novella, "Night", he recounts in horrifying detail the unspeakable suffering of concentration camp victims. One story, in particular, stands out, I quote from his book

"The SS hung two Jewish men and a boy before the assembled inhabitants of the camp. The man dies quickly, but the death struggle of the boy lasted half an hour. "Where is God. Where is He?" a man behind me asked. As the boy, after a long time, was still in agony on the rope, I heard the man cry again, "Where is God now?" and I heard a voice within me answer, "Here He is—He is hanging on the gallows..."

Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross can be appreciated by all those who have experienced moments of anguish and desolation in their life. That would be true as well of those who identify themselves as atheists. On Golgotha, he entered into their darkness and ours. It is a great mystery.

If, in sorrow and confusion, You should ask, "Where is God now?", it would be advisable to take hold of a crucifix and ponder the mystery of Our Divine Lord on the cross. One need not look far for an answer. God is hanging on the cross! Ironically, it is often those who are endure the greatest sufferings who are precisely the very ones who discover God, amen.