

# **DAY 7**

**I - GETHSEMANE**

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Etymologically the name Gethsemane is probably related to oil press. Jesus was truly pressed, crushed. The expression used in the Latin *Vulgate* translation of Mark 14: 33 reads in English: *he began to feel disgusted, fearful and sad*. Looking at what he could somehow anticipate, the question trying him was: *was it all really worth it?* Jesus had been serious about attracting followers to form a “new Israel”, he was not just pretending, and he now sees his closest friends falling asleep as he struggles. Surely, they were tired, but so was he.

It is this desolate feeling that places his passion in a clearly religious perspective. Spiritual desolation draws us away from God, while spiritual consolation draws us to God. Jesus’ internal struggle draws him to the Father. Jesus is experiencing spiritual consolation in the midst of very desolate feelings, as will be the case later on the cross. On one occasion he had asked James and John: *can you drink the chalice I am going to drink?* [Mt. 20: 22]. Now he drinks a bitter chalice, but he does not pass it on to his disciples: *remain here and stay awake with me*, and later he will say to those arresting him: *let these go* [Jn.18: 8]. He will drink the chalice alone. In the desolate feeling of his internal struggle, Jesus asks the Father: *could not this be done differently?*, yet *not as I would like it, but as you Father desire it* [Mt. 26: 34].

Jesus returns from prayer with strengthened determination: *let us go, my betrayer is at hand*. The Father has given him that inner strength, not to make the crisis disappear, but to remain loyal through it all. The Scottish philosopher and lecturer John Macmurray compared true and false religion. False religion tells us: *all these things you are afraid of, do not worry, because God will see to it that they do not happen to you*. By contrast true religion tells us: *all these things you are afraid of could well happen, but there is no need to be afraid of them, because God is with you*. Jesus was not daydreaming about a false religion’s hollow promise, but was encouraged by the assurance that the Father was with him.

Without pondering Gethsemane in prayer, we will never understand the Lord’s passion, to the extent that such cruel treatment can be understood. Gethsemane is the key to everything that will follow. In his struggle Jesus chose loyalty **at any price**, but that price was named by others, not by him. The externals of the passion take on meaning precisely from the Lord’s attitude of loyalty **at any price**. In his relatively recent film “The Passion of the Christ” the director Mel Gibson misses the point miserably, as he pivots the film exclusively on the gory details of what others do to Jesus, not on Jesus’ inner attitude through that suffering. We desire to *listen* to Jesus’ **deed**. The details of the punishment inflicted on him are his adversaries’ deeds, not his. His **deed** lies in his heart.

## REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

### GETHSEMANE

*Mt. 26: 21-35; Mk. 14: 17-31; Lk. 22: 14-38; Jn. 13: 1-30*