

## When Jesus Weeps

- A long-time member with a prickly personality and often at the center of church conflicts is murdered by her deranged son.
- The two thought of as particularly well-matched and loving, abruptly announce that because of infidelities and irreconcilable differences they are divorcing after 15 years of marriage.
- Four high schoolers whose intelligence and exuberance delighted many are killed on their way home from the prom by a drunk driver
- A respected 58-year-old lay leader loses his job when his company's fortunes take a dive; he is shell-shocked and discouraged.
- A malignant tumor is spotted in a 38-year-old who only recently started attending worship services and Sunday school. Aggressive and debilitating treatment must begin immediately.
- A man identifies himself as a recovering child sex offender and presents himself at the altar wanting to know if he can join the church.

These stories are true. The challenges and possibilities they represent form the milieu for congregational care and pastoral leadership nearly everywhere. One gifted pastor and his congregation regularly pray: **“Gracious and loving God, send to us all those no other church wants.”** He tells me that God repeatedly and bountifully answers prayer!

Another colleague acknowledges how difficult it is to know what to do in her Sunday school class when the man with special needs regularly draws attention by demanding a soda or wanting to know what time it is. Until they find another answer, the group “pauses” in their lessons to include and address him.

The wounded are sometimes our friends and other times strangers. The hurt we encounter may be visible or mysteriously hidden. The character of the suffering we are called to soothe with God's balm can be familiar, perplexing, or abhorrent.

What are the prayers you and your congregation are saying about your welcome and response to “the least of these”? How are you getting ready to address the longings for Jesus' compassion of those who see their wounds, and those of us whose wounds may yet be hidden?

Consider how you may discern and learn from the offerings on the pages that follow. We pray that you will find encouragement and wisdom so that you will be prepared for the moment when Jesus weeps, and the Church is called to witness to God's justice, mercy, and hope.

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