

## Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity

by Peter Covington

As Jesus neared the end of his life, I imagine he probably felt more human than in the all the years since his incarnation into human flesh, especially feeling his humanity in the ways that humans are not like God. He experienced great grief, longing and physical pain; he was abandoned and betrayed by his friends; and in the twists and random chance that beset the human condition, I tend to believe he was not all knowing of what exactly would come next. The greatest discomfort of physical punishment as well as malice and cruelty is often not knowing exactly when the lash will strike or who will attack next.

Part of the tradition of Lent is to experience some of the suffering of Jesus. Thus we are often told to give up comforts and usual consolations, to spend time alone, and to fast. So in uniting with Jesus, we are in essence invited to become more human during Lent.



When we accept pain and uncertainty for what it is, simply part of life, we can receive the gift, perhaps as a form of reincarnation as we put aside some of our God-given talents, privileges and blessings and fully remember our human-ness. We remember the One who voluntarily took on this frail form in order to redeem all

humans. To call us his brothers and sisters' he took up his cross, in a sense, shouldering his pain and his humanity, before giving it up permanently.

Humans are strange hybrids, in bodies like animals but also with souls and divine spirit within us. To be human is really to be both at once. As a younger man I often tried to forget the pain, tried to keep high minded and also enjoy the carnal pleasures that titillate the body.

There is nothing wrong with this—all is a gift from God. But as I age, I continue to learn “sweet are the uses of adversity,” as Shakespeare says (*As You Like It*) “...that lovingly persuade me what I am.”

I will not be so glib as to assume that there is anything “sweet” about capital punishment, but in Scripture, Jesus shows evidence that he knows what he is

walking towards and why. There are also angels who come to minister to him. Like us, Jesus was not given more than he could bear and he received divine care.

The pain and disappointments of being human point us back to God. Even Shakespeare had to age, and by the time he wrote Hamlet, he knew the “heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.” As I go through life I learn that being human can be painful. I use time of Lent to accept this truth and balance it with the glory that God has instilled in us, to unite with Christ in this act of re-discovery.