

ANGUISH



The only time that the Evangelists use the term “anguish” or “distressed” in connection with Jesus is in the Garden of Olives when it is said that “He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed” (Mark 14:33; cf. Matt 26:37). The disciples Jesus took with him were his closest ones, the ones who had seen his splendor manifest itself on Mount Tabor and, fortified by this vision, would be able to support, without losing hope, the sight of Jesus in the throes of distress. They were to accompany him in prayer, to watch with him.

That Jesus was truly in distress can be gleaned from the words of Jesus himself who confessed “My soul is sorrowful even to death” (Mark 14:34; cf. Matt 26:38). He was expressing himself in the language of the Psalms, “My soul is sorrowful” (cf. Ps 43:5), and the definition “even unto death” echoes the experiences lived by many of God’s messengers in the Old Testament who invoke death as a relief to the enmities encountered in the mission confided to them by God (cf. Num 11:14-15).

One can say that if there is a particular moment in which the humanity of Jesus was demonstrated in an unequivocal fashion, it was here in the Garden of Olives, on the night of his betrayal by Judas.

John, while not describing the tragic moment of Jesus' internal struggle at Gethsemane, does not fail to take notice of the agitated state of the Master. Indeed, following the exultant "Hosanna" from the crowd upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the fourth evangelist speaks of Jesus' anxiety: "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour"(John 12:27).

But the Johannine Jesus is not left alone in his anguish. As had already occurred elsewhere in the fourth Gospel, here the Father is listening and answers him: "'Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again'" (John 12:28).

In contrast, in the Synoptic Gospels the experience at Gethsemane is one of extreme solitude. The Father remains silent. Luke alone provides him with the comfort of an angel (Luke 22:43).