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Crucifixion helps make meaning of pain in church, world

by Jamie Manson



Actors portray the Crucifixion during the Stations of the Cross at World Youth Day in Sydney in this 2008 photo. (CNS)

I've had more than one Catholic who grew up either before or on the cusp of Vatican II tell me horror stories of how they were taught that Jesus died *because* of their sins.

This was a particularly heavy-handed way for priests and nuns to lay an even thicker coat of guilt on impressionable Catholic school children. Because they were sinners, Jesus had to suffer and die to redeem them. It was one rendering of the traditional theological interpretations of the crucifixion -- that Jesus *had* to die to fulfill the Scriptures and that his death atoned for the sins of the world.

I know that countless people throughout the centuries have found profound, life-changing and even comforting meaning in this understanding of the Cross. But I've often felt that if we immerse ourselves in the accounts of Jesus' arrest, passion, and death as told by the four Gospels, these texts can broaden and deepen our understanding of the crucifixion. It can help us make meaning of so much of the anguish that

we witness in our world and in our church.

When I read the passion narratives of the Gospels, I don't hear simply that Jesus suffered and died for our sins. Rather, I hear the four evangelists very clearly say that Jesus' suffering and death was the will of those who conspired against him -- those whose political systems he had undermined, those whose religious convictions he had offended.

Jesus' passion and death is a result of deeply-human intolerance, jealousy, resentment, hatred, and, most of all, fear.

To read Manson's full column, see: **Crucifixion helps make meaning of pain in church, world**

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