

**Pope Francis:  
'If you don't learn how to weep, you're not a good Christian'**

[Thomas Reese](#) | *Jan. 23, 2015*

The most extraordinary event of the pope's Asian tour was [his encounter with a weeping 12-year-old Filipina](#) who asked why God lets bad things happen to innocent children. The encounter was unscripted, so the pope had to respond in Spanish because his written text was inadequate. I confess that as a priest, I was never attracted to hospital ministry because I feared being hit with such questions. As a young, inexperienced priest, I remember walking into a hospital room with a mother caring for a dying child. I wanted to help, but felt totally inadequate with nothing to say.

Yes, I had learned all the canned explanations: It's God's will; God has a plan; she will be happy in heaven; we have to bear the cross God gives us. I was smart enough not to inflict such trite responses on a grieving mother, but I did not know what to say. Glyzelle Palomar and so many children suffered through the devastating typhoon that hit the Philippines last year. "Why did God let this happen to us?" she asked the pope, covering her face with her hands as she sobbed. "There are many children neglected by their own parents," she told Pope Francis. "There are also many who became victims and many terrible things happened to them, like drugs or prostitution. Why is God allowing such things to happen, even if it is not the fault of the children? And why are there only very few people helping us?"

The pope first applauded the girl for expressing herself so courageously. [He told the crowd](#) of young people at Manila's University of Santo Tomas to pay attention because she "asked the only question that does not have an answer." The pope did not respond with a theological lecture on the mystery of evil. Rather, he affirmed her tears, saying, "Only when we are able to weep about the things that you lived can we understand something and answer something." He acknowledged that "the great question for all is: Why do children suffer? Why do children suffer?" But he finds an answer not in the head, but in the heart. "Only when the heart is able to ask the question and weep can we understand something." For Francis, the world needs to respond by helping the victims of disasters with aid and money. He notes that Christ cured the sick and fed the hungry, and so should we. But, he adds, "it was only when Christ wept and was able to weep that he understood our dramas."

Those who suffer need not only help but tears. "Today's world needs to weep," he said. "The marginalized weep, those left aside weep, the scorned weep ... but those of us who lead a life more or less without needs, don't know how to weep. Certain realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears." He then invited the young audience to ask themselves, "Have I learned to weep? Have I learned to weep when I see a hungry child, a drugged child on the street, a homeless child, an abandoned child, an abused child, a child used as a slave by society?" Or do we only weep when we want something for ourselves? "Why do children suffer?" Francis asked. "The great answer we can all give is to learn to weep." He pointed to the example of Jesus in the Gospels. "He wept for his dead friend; he wept in his heart for that family that had lost their daughter; he wept in his heart when he saw that mother, a poor widow, taking her son to be buried; he was moved and wept in his heart when he saw the multitudes like sheep without a shepherd. If you don't learn how to weep, you're not a good Christian!"

In conclusion, he says, "When we are asked, 'Why do children suffer?' 'Why does this or that happen, this tragic thing in life?' May our answer either be silence or a word born of tears. Be courageous; don't be afraid to cry." The mystery of evil is beyond my comprehension. The answers that I have heard I find unsatisfactory. I don't find any words in the Bible that explain it. I have concluded that since it is beyond our comprehension, Jesus came not to explain suffering but to weep with us and to suffer with us. I prefer to see the cross not so much as reparation for our sins, but as God's way of joining us in our suffering. Instead of preaching from the sidelines, he gets down in the dirt and suffers with us. That is real love. The pope's words also remind me of a scene in Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth*. When a statue of Our Lady of Sorrows begins weeping (it's a fake), a woman who lost her son in an earthquake experiences healing and says her first words since his death: "She understands."

The mother of Jesus weeps at the foot of the cross, and that is why through the centuries, women who have lost their children through sickness, accidents, wars, and natural disasters have turned to Our Lady of Sorrows for comfort. She lost a child. She understands. Only when we weep can we understand.

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