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Easter is Never Done

By Dodd Sims, M.D.

The cross seems to be everywhere recently. After all, we're in the Easter season. An image of the cross that has struck me deeply is from a Good Friday procession this year in Poland. The cross was draped in the Ukrainian flag.

The *Washington Post* published this photo accompanying the [Easter reflection](#) of one of my favorite columnists, Michael Gerson. In his Opinion piece, Gerson relates what I've long felt is one of the most searing depictions of the cross. It comes from the novel, *Night*, a memoir by Elie Wiesel, telling his experience and suffering with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps during the Holocaust and World War II.

In *Night*, Wiesel tells the story of the execution of three prisoners by their Nazi guards that the entire camp is forced to watch. Condemned for sabotage, two men and one boy are led to the camp gallows in front of the assembled prisoners. At the order of the camp commandant, the chairs are

kicked out from under the prisoners, and they are left dangling from a noose around their neck.

The two men die quickly, but the malnourished boy dies very slowly. He twists in agony because his small body does not have enough weight to draw the noose tight. Someone in the crowd of prisoners cries out, "Where is God? Where is he in all of this?" The narrator says, "And I heard a voice within me answer him: . . . Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows."

In more current times, we've witnessed this kind of sacrifice as well.

I remember Matthew Shepard. He was the gay University of Wyoming student brutally beaten and tortured. His body was left hanging on a fence outside the university town of Laramie. Matthew's death in 1998 brought national and international attention to hate crimes and spurred legislation. Matthew is buried in the National Cathedral, a sacred space that reflects our Easter faith in the risen Lord and the power of the Cross to overcome suffering and death.

Of the many books I had to read in seminary, one had a particularly provocative title I cannot forget. It is Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. The title alone is complex and his main argument even more so. This is not beach reading.

But the basic idea is this: if we believe that Jesus was God and that Jesus died on the cross, then it was God who suffered and died on the cross. Yes, the cross is the foundation of everything we believe. But at the same time, this perspective challenges some traditional views of the death on the cross. The cross was not a one-time phenomenon; unfortunately, it is a process that plays itself out over and over again. We are never done with Easter.

Holocaust books are written and read in the hope that it will never happen again. We bury our martyrs in high-profile places like the National Cathedral, always praying that this will be the last child of God to die on a cross.

But of course, it continues.

A few days after Easter, the media reported the case of a Mexican woman who had apparently used a ladder to scale the border wall on the Mexican side. But on the American side of the wall, she became entangled in the ropes she was using to lower herself to the ground. She died alone after hanging upside down on the wall for many hours.

She was thirty-two years old and left two young daughters in Mexico. She had a name: Griselda Verduzco Armenta.

Say it out loud: Griselda Verduzco Armenta.

Easter Day, itself, is over while our Easter season is continuing. In our liturgical year, we are looking forward to Pentecost and waiting for God's gift of the Holy Spirit. We await, with hope, the many new blessings that God will work in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God brings new life where there was death. God identifies completely with the suffering of humanity.

But let us keep looking for the cross. The reality of the cross is in its ubiquity. The cross is present everywhere. Easter is never done.