

Why did Jesus sweat blood?

by Fr. Joel Graves

Many people do not realize Jesus sweat blood as he prayed. But when we talk about Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, most people believe Jesus worried about the coming torture and death on the cross. Or they think Jesus suffered from some kind of doubt, because in Matthew we read: *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")* Matthew 27:46, also Psalm 22:1.

1. Was Jesus worried about a beating?
2. Was Jesus suffering from debilitating doubts about his mission and purpose in life? Was Jesus unsure of his role as God and Savior and Messiah, as the Pascal Lamb of God who would—in a few hours—take away the sins of the world?

Not for one second, because both ideas are wrong.

What event in your own life would worry you so much, would cause you such anxiety and fear, grieve you so deeply and severely, that you would pray for God to make it pass, if possible, or give you an alternative path, and sweat blood in the agony of your prayer to him?

We have all experienced tragedy in our lives. Some people have experienced horror. I have lost loved ones and many friends over the years. As a combat veteran, I have seen the horrors of war, terribly close up. And yet, although I have prayed most fervently for some people and events, I have not prayed with the intensity necessary to break capillaries. I can scarcely imagine that kind of intense prayer.

Just before Judas walked up the hill with the detachment of soldiers, Jesus was praying on the Mount of Olives.

Luke 22:39-44 tells us that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray [as was his custom], and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, *"Pray that you will not fall into temptation."* He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. **And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling on the ground."**



The medical term for bloody sweat is *hematidrosis*. Although rare, it occurs when a person is under great emotional stress and tiny capillaries in the sweat glands break.

Why was Jesus sweating blood? Was Jesus worried about receiving a horrific beating in a few hours followed by an agonizing death by torture? Was he suffering from crippling doubts? **NO.**

Jesus was sweating blood because he had never been separated from his Father in all of eternity. Later that day, he would find himself separated from God for the first time on this cross, and cry out for God.

How is it possible that Jesus had never been separated from God—ever?

Jesus said it himself: *“And now Father, glorify me in your presence with **the glory I had with you before the world began**”* (John 17:5).

The Apostle John wrote about it: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made”* (John 1:1-3).

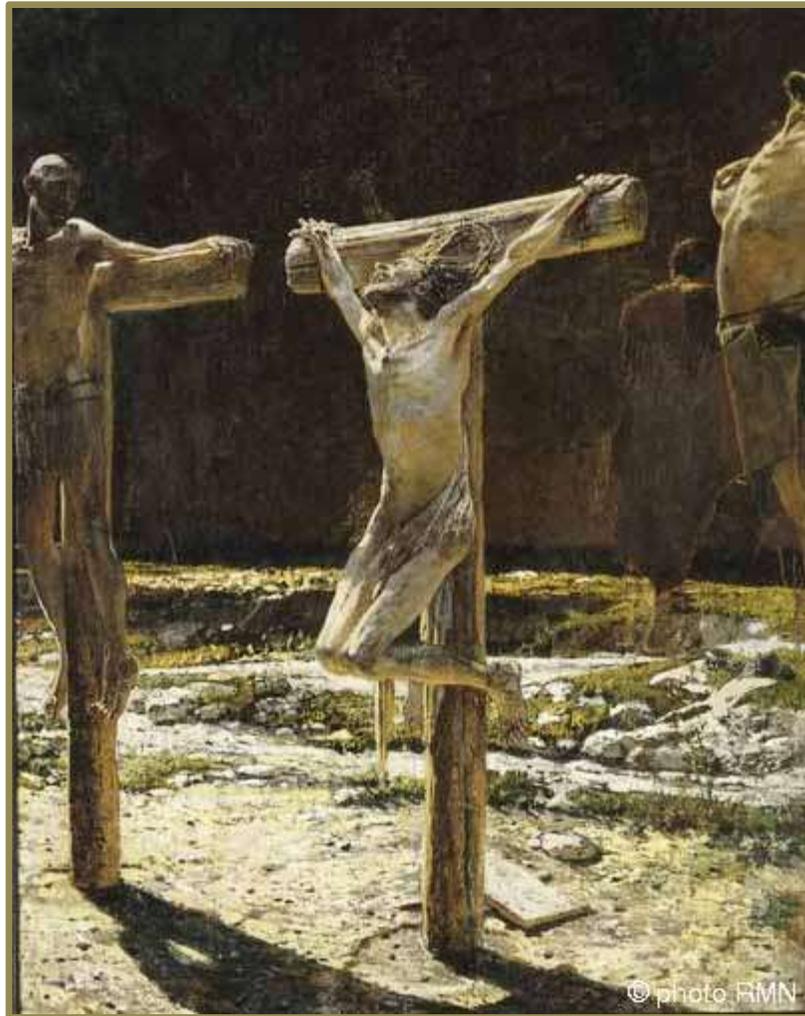
He knew God at his birth. Psalm 22:9, *“Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.”*

From the beginning of eternity—from the foundation of our universe, Jesus was with God. He was with God in the womb of Mary, and knew God at his birth.

In Isaiah 49, Isaiah was not talking about himself. As in other passages, he was speaking of the Messiah. *“Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.”*

In Luke chapter 2, we learn that when Jesus was eleven years old, the family went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Without telling anyone, he stayed behind, talking to the priests in the temple. When his parents found him three days later, he said, *“Why were you searching for me?”* he asked, *“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”* But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

In all of history, Jesus had never been separated from his Father—they were one (think Trinity). But at the crucifixion, he would be separated, disconnected, for the first time. That is why he prayed for the cup to pass, if there was any other way. This is why he was sweating blood. He could not imagine what it would be like to be separated from God. (I do not think of it as the cup of his death or crucifixion, but the Cup of Separation). Incomprehensible. Unimaginable. Terrifying.



And yet, Jesus obeys.

From the cross, as Jesus took on the sins of the whole world, he felt the presence of the Father depart, and what did he say? *“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit”* (Matthew 27:46, 50).

Jesus completed his mission to save the earth—and us. He did not die of the scourging or the crucifixion; he willingly and purposefully gave up his spirit and died (John 10:18). When the Roman soldier pierced his side, out came water and blood, the sign of a broken heart.

How long was Jesus separated from God on the cross?

I always wondered about this passage in Isaiah—it does not quite fit with the story of Israel that Isaiah is telling. Instead, inserted in the middle, like Isaiah often does, is another mention of the Messiah. *“For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the LORD your Redeemer”* (Isaiah 54:7-8).

Why was Jesus sweating blood?

Because he had never been separated from God.

And when it does happen, it breaks his heart—and he dies.

FINAL THOUGHTS

1. And he dies. You might say, “Wow. Amazing. Wonderful. Beautiful.” But think about it. Jesus suffered all of this for you. His agonizing, blood-dripping prayer was ultimately for you. He cried out to God, *“Why have you forsaken me?”* for you. Jesus died for you, taking your sins on his self, and it killed him. Your sins killed him, because it caused Father God to pull away from Jesus for the first time in eternal history, and Jesus died. It broke his heart. Because of you and for you. Jesus suffered this and died, knowing that in the far distant future, you would need him to be saved and have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world (you) that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God loves you more than you can possibly and scarcely imagine. And yet, many people will acknowledge this wonderful act by Jesus, and simply walk away. But don’t. Let yourself be affected. Let this act by Jesus transform you life—forever.

How? you might ask. By personally accepting this incredible sacrifice for yourself. Paul tells us how in the book of Romans. *Confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved* (Romans 10:9-10). Say the words: *I believe. I accept Jesus as my Lord. I believe God raised Jesus from the dead.* Now, if you have done that, read the Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament. Study what Jesus says there and obey what he teaches. Find a church that teaches the bible and attend faithfully.

(If you think you are without sin, please email me. We are born in sin, because the sin of Adam was passed down to everyone, so we all inherited sinfulness, not just by our sinful actions. So we must accept Jesus to have eternal life in heaven).

2. Jesus’ relationship with the Father was unimaginably close and intimate—always had been. That is why it is absurd to suggest that Jesus had a relationship with anyone else (some think he married Mary Magdalene and had a family). He did not have time or room in his heart for anyone but his Abba Father God.

You might ask, Why does this matter? It matters, because if Jesus married someone, anyone, and actually did not die on the cross, or somehow survived, then he was not the Messiah, he was not God, and the Christian faith is a deplorable sham, and the New Testament is a book of lies. The Apostle Paul explained it this way, *“And if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people”* (1 Cor 15:17-18). But Christ did rise from the dead—for you, and those who believe in him will spend eternity in heaven.