



### **Hope Amidst Suffering | Prof. Rev. Martin Micallef**

The passion narratives which form the longest section in each gospel, are not just a historical event that took place over two thousand years ago; they are also the fulfillment of God's plan for salvation foretold in the Old Testament; the ultimate expression of the Son's obedience which he maintained till the end (Jn 19:30); the Father's "command" to the Son to lay down his life (Jn 10:18); the "cup" he had to drink (Jn 18:11); and the "hour" during which he was distressed (Jn 12:27). Ultimately, they are the last mode of revelation: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (Jn 8:28).

As readers of the Gospel, we are invited to engage in the world and the systems of values contained within these narratives, including the image of God and his relation to human suffering. The theological conversation about God and suffering was evidenced in a special way by the Shoah during

which massive suffering was inflicted during World War II, and raised challenging theological questions, such as: where was God in all this?

Theologians were forced to think about such issues in a renewed way, insisting that God's transcendence is realized in his pain and suffering for humanity which contrasts the concept of an impassible God that was developed in Christian theology with the aid of Greek philosophy. "The Deus impassibilis is a God without heart and without compassion, a cold heavenly power" (Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 70). In so doing, these theologians tried to enable others to relate to God in the face of unspeakable suffering.

Such theological categories, however, remain incapable of defining the mystery of God who is faithful to us. We should remain aware of our theologies of suffering and to allow our own perspectives to talk with God to offer lessons on sacrifice and hope. "I believe in You, God of Israel, even though You have done everything to stop me from believing in

You ... I bow my head before Your greatness, but will not kiss the lash with which You strike me" (Yossel Rakover, quoted in Daniel Harrington, *Why Do We Suffer?* [Franklin/Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2000], 1).