

Theological Imaginings: Compassionate Heart



At the Cross her vigil keeping
Stood the mournful mother weeping
Close to Jesus to the last



Can the human heart refrain
From partaking in her pain
In that mother's pain untold



By the cross with you we stay
There with you to weep and pray
Is all I ask of you to give

Stabat Mater Dolorosa
13th Century Hymn



[Click here to play track | 2 Cellos: Benedictus](#)

Turn to next page while music plays

Fade music out when appropriate

In the early summer evening in Sydney, Australia on February 1, 2020, 7 children-brothers, sisters, and cousins set off to walk to the nearby local shops to buy ice-cream.

The children were talking and giggling as they set out -four of them never returned home.

Siblings, Antony (13), Angelina (12) and Sienna (9) Abdullah and their cousin Veronique (11) Sakr, were killed instantly when a large utility truck, driven by a young man high on cocaine and heavily intoxicated and travelling at an excessively high speed, veered to the wrong side of the road, mounted the kerb and ploughed into the 7 children, scattering their bodies up to seventeen metres.



Antony Abdullah



Angelina Abdullah



Sienna Abdullah



Veronique Sakr

Upon hearing the horrific noise of the crash and the screams of one of the surviving children calling for help, a woman, Margret Primc, who lived across the road, together with other neighbours, ran to the scene.

What faced Margaret and those who rushed to help, was a scene of carnage and chaos. Margaret saw Angelina lying unconscious and immediately joined with others in their efforts to resuscitate the young girl.

“I was doing mouth to mouth” she said, “when the paramedics arrived to assist. They took over the resuscitation but pronounced Angelina dead and then moved to attend to the other dying and injured children.”

Margaret sat there holding the broken body of Angelina - stroking her hair and kissing her on the forehead as a mother would, telling the dead child she would not leave her alone.

Respecting Angelina’s dignity Margaret said she tidied the child’s top because it had ridden up leaving her body exposed.

This ever so small action motivated by Margaret's heartfelt compassion continues to bring me to tears when I reflect on that scene.

Michelangelo's image of Mary the mother of Jesus holding her dead Son after He was taken down from the cross is the image I hold of Margaret Primc at that moment.



What happened that tragic evening has changed the lives of the Abdullah and Sakr families forever, as it has for the 29 year old driver Samuel Davidson and his grieving parents. It changed the lives of those who came to assist.



Galvanised by desire to help in any way they could, people of all faiths, from all walks of life, friends, neighbours and strangers, gathered to support the grieving Abdullah and Sakr families, offering prayers to God to strengthen and comfort the bereaved. The local community wrapped its

arms around the wounded families, participating in the evening prayer vigils and providing practical assistance.

In a conversation I had with Leila Abdullah, the children's mother, she told me that she did not cook a meal for 6 months, that flowers adorned their home every day, that friends came to pray with her and others cared for her other three children. Even a complete stranger came and made Leila a dress to wear to the children's funeral.



No less than two days after the accident Leila Abdullah and her husband Danny at the site where their children's lives had ended so abruptly, opened their hearts to the driver who by his self-destructive actions had wiped out half their family. While dealing with their unimaginable and unfathomable loss Danny and Leila chose to forgive Samuel Davidson. Leila spoke these words:

“I forgive him. I do not hate him I forgive him, but I want justice for my children.”



[Leila Abdullah: “I forgive him. I do not hate him I forgive him, but I want justice for my children.”](#)

[Click the image to watch the YouTube video](#)

Many have questioned Leila and Danny's ability to offer forgiveness to the perpetrator:

“How is it possible that you can forgive what this man has done to you?”

With heartfelt compassion and strength, they have shared with the Australian community their understanding of what it means to live as a follower of Jesus, who on his cross prayed for forgiveness for those responsible for His death:

“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”

From their state of deep anguish and desolation Leila and Danny pray daily the words that Jesus gave us:

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”

In his homily in the Year of Mercy Pope Francis spoke the following words:

“At times how hard it seems to forgive, yet pardon is the instrument placed in our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”

I have chosen to share the story of Antony, Angelina, Sienna and Veronique and the Abdullah and Sakr families, because their message of forgiveness and courage speaks so clearly to me and to others what it means to have a compassionate heart.



Henri Nouwen once wrote “Compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there”.

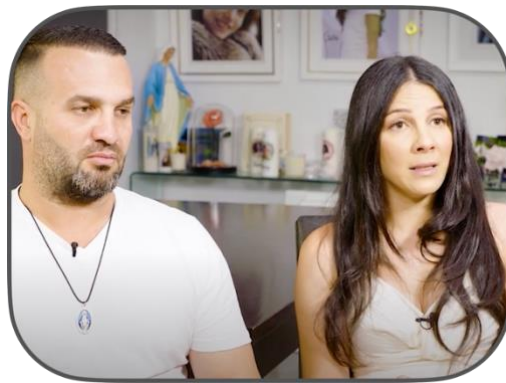
In the last year and a half our global community has witnessed suffering on a scale the likes of which many of us have not been seen before. We have witnessed or experienced in our communities and in our family and friendship circle, moments of isolation, uncertainty, fear, resentment, separation from loved ones, shattered dreams and shared moments of untold grief and misery.



We have also witnessed or experienced remarkable moments of compassionate healing, compassionate listening, compassionate care and compassionate acts of love.

As a community of Mercy, we are called by our charism, to unleash a pandemic of kindness and compassion that is ultimately the gift of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Leila and Danny and Bridget, because of their faith and trust in God's love have chosen not to hate and not to seek revenge but to embrace their loss so as to live in a state of peace and freedom.



[Click the image to watch the YouTube video](#)

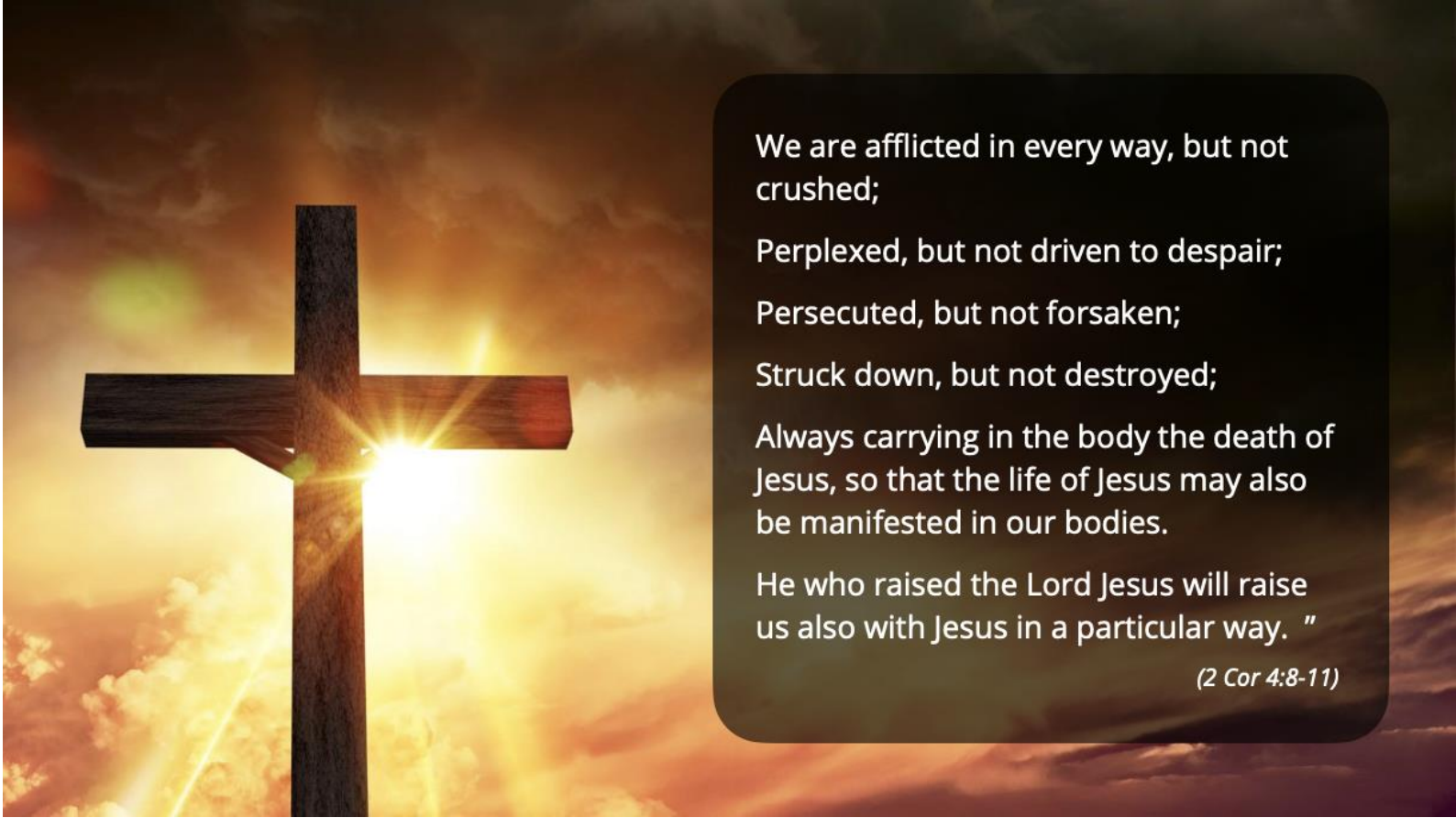
On the anniversary of their children's death, they have now given birth to a nation-wide [i4give Foundation](#) to encourage reconciliation and harmony at every level of community.

At the launch of the [i4give Foundation](#) Leila, Danny and Bridget spoke these words:

“February 1st will not be remembered as a day of tragedy, but a day of forgiveness and celebration, a day to stop, reflect and search our hearts for someone to forgive.

Forgiveness starts in your heart, spreads to the family and reaches your community.”

As we celebrate in the coming days and weeks the memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of the Jesus, the Wounded Healer and Compassionate Saviour let us remember the words of St Paul to the Corinthians:



We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;

Perplexed, but not driven to despair;

Persecuted, but not forsaken;

Struck down, but not destroyed;

Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus in a particular way. "

(2 Cor 4:8-11)

