



— Reflection by Alexandra Carroll, M.T.S.

On September 13, 2017, the state of Ohio executed Gary Otte. Gary lived a life of poverty, addiction, abuse, and violence. He took the lives of two people. Amidst much tragedy, he also found God.



Gary Otte, executed September 13, 2017, by the state of Ohio.

Read the Essay on drug addiction Gary wrote just days before his execution here: <http://bit.ly/2zzxWtG>.

Just days before his execution, Gary wrote a letter explaining how he used his faith in God to help him beat his addiction and turn his life around in prison.<sup>21</sup>

In the aftermath of inflicting great harm on his victims and their families, Otte spent his time in prison working to turn

from violence and harm to the saving power of God's grace. Depicting the power of forgiveness and the strength that comes from faith, Gary Otte's prophetic letter calls us all to greater humility and mercy in our efforts to create a more just society.

<sup>21</sup> Eric Sandy, "Gary Otte Writes Essay on Drug Addiction Days Before Scheduled Execution in Ohio," *Cleveland Scene*, September 11, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2BIR5Un>.

## Good Friday

March 30, 2018

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"Because of his affliction  
he shall see the light  
in fullness of days;  
through his suffering,  
my servant shall justify many,  
and their guilt he shall bear."

– Isaiah 53: 12

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### First Reading

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

### Responsorial Psalm

Psalms 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25

### Second Reading

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

### Gospel

John 18:1—19:42



Center of  
Concern

Perhaps the most poignant moment of Gary Otte's short story is what happened on the morning of September 13, 2017. In his final moments, with his final breaths, Gary called out to God: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."<sup>22</sup> We mourn and pray for Gary Otte's victims and their families. We also can not help but be struck by the events surrounding his execution. As we mark Good Friday, we are invited to let the events of Christ's death transform and compel us to stand up against the injustices of our world.

On Good Friday we observe in somber reflection the sacrifice that was made for us. Not as a barter for our redemption, nor as the only way to save our souls, but to show us the way of the Kingdom of God. In God's love for us, we are given the powerful and awe inspiring truth of the Gospel, that in Christ's death we can find new life. Christ's prophetic and countercultural call is too much for our society as it stands today. The shocking and earth shattering call to love your neighbor as yourself, to lose your life for the needs of another, cannot be fully understood without the actions of Good Friday.



Photo Credit: Scott Langley

The message of Christ becomes even more scandalized in light of Good Friday. The Messiah died in order to show us the way to true freedom, "He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed" (Isaiah 52:5). In dying on the cross Christ bore all that made us unable to hear the message to mercy and reconciliation. Now, as we remember this act of love we are called to live as though we have been given new life.

From the point of death on the cross, Jesus gave us this gift. Jesus forgives us. Depicted in John's gospel with the simple statement of "it is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus accepts his death and leaves us with the gift of the Spirit. In that moment we are given the gift of a forgiveness that never ceases. We are invited to feel, to mourn, and to respond in mercy. In the death of Christ on this Good Friday, we are given the opportunity to act in ways that change this pattern of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Tray Connor, "Ohio Executes Double Murderer Gary Otte as He Signs Hymn," NBC News, September 13, 2017, <http://nbcnews.to/2eV9zhJ>.

Johann Baptist Metz, a German Theologian, begins his reflection on suffering in our society from the point of the cross. For Metz, the pivotal point of Christianity is the crucifixion of Christ, where Metz says that at the scene of the cross, Christians “faithfully remember the testament of his love, in which God’s dominion among men and women appeared precisely in the fact that dominion that human beings exercise over one another began to be pulled down, that Jesus declared himself to be on the side of the invisible ones.”<sup>2</sup> The memory of the crucifixion serves as a dangerous reminder of the call of discipleship. This “dangerous memory” of the crucifixion is to serve as a disruption in the continual cycle of violence and injustice we see in our society.<sup>3</sup> The memory of Christ’s crucifixion is to dangerously compel us toward action for the common good.

The events of Good Friday reveal the length to which humanity can take injustice; but in the dangerous memory of crucifixion of Jesus we are forever changed. We are now obligated to confront the state that crucifies in our name, to oppose injustice and to stand in solidarity with all those who are dehumanized, vilified, and crucified in our times. The dangerous memory of Christ’s death on the cross demands we question our continued use of violence today.

If Christ bore the sins to make us all whole, why do we continue to crucify each other? Why do we continue to allow the execution of individuals like Gary Otte, who while guilty of a grave wrong deserve the same opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation that we do? How many more dangerous memories will it take for us to remember the call we were given as Christ died on the cross?

The dangerous memory of Christ’s crucifixion compels us to remember the 1463 people we have executed with the modern use of capital punishment. These memories serve as a stark reminder of the Gospel call to mercy and peace and oblige us to take action to bring this message of love and peace to fruition. Christian discipleship requires us to allow Good Friday to serve as an impetus to move beyond state sanctioned executions and to end the cycle of violence.

In the aftermath of the great event of suffering we witness on Good Friday, we are called to a new way of living. In remembering the suffering of Christ, we choose to respond to the horror and pain of our time by working for something greater. Let us embrace this call to peace, let us allow Good Friday to dangerously move us from violence to mercy.

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<sup>2</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology,” New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2011, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 102.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Bryan Stevenson’s work illuminates the power of dangerous memory. Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and author of *Just Mercy* (Penguin Random House, 2014). He spawned a public remembrance of our nation’s tragic history of lynching in our nation by creating lynching memorials: <http://bit.ly/2y0Lv4d>. What are other examples of dangerous memories throughout our society or salvation history that we need to keep in the forefront of our consciousness in order that they not be repeated?
- How do you, unconsciously or unintentionally, participate in the suffering of others? In what ways does our inaction or lack of memory perpetuate systems of oppression and injustice in our world?
- What are ways that you have, or feel called to “turn over the tables” to draw attention to unjust systems and practices in our country and world?
- What is your personal dangerous memory that compels you to act against injustice? When has that memory of suffering brought to you to resistance and action against an instance of injustice?

## FAITH IN ACTION

- Learn more about the impact and power of public memorials. Bryan Stevenson’s latest project serves as a way to revisit and give voice to the injustices of our past through lynching site memorials. Watch *Lynching in America-Uprooted*: <http://bit.ly/2ylv5PL>.
- Journey the way of the Cross. Invite the dangerous memory of Christ’s crucifixion to awaken you to action. CMN’s special death penalty theme, “Stations of the Cross,” will give you the opportunity to meditate on the complex and unjust realities of the death penalty while journeying with Christ on his passion: <http://bit.ly/CMNStations>.
- Stand in solidarity with all our sisters and brothers awaiting execution by standing in prayer and vigil. CMN’s Vigil for an Execution invites you and your faith community to join in prayer and lift up the need to end the death penalty in light of Christ’s own experience of state-sanctioned execution: <http://bit.ly/CMNExecutionVigil>.

## PRAYER

Grant me, me, O God, the courage to remember those who suffer. Guide me in the ways of justice and peace so as to respond to injustice. Allow the dangerous memory of Christ on the cross to fill my heart and challenge me to resist our modern day crucifixions. May the memory of Good Friday inspire us as we work to end the cycle of violence in our society. Amen.

