



2014 AWARDS
BY THE CATHOLIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

Best Essay
Prayer and Spirituality

Honorable Mention

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

by Heather King

Recently I was walking to morning Mass in Los Angeles, with the trees and sky above, and the traffic and noise and violence of rush hour below. I kept looking up: to the birds; to a place where I could imagine it was quiet. If you get very quiet, you hear, at the very center of the universe, a pulse, a beat. You hear the birds and the honking horns, the suffering and the joy. You hear the Sacred Heart of Christ.

So in the middle of a city of millions, I decided to pray the rosary.

And praying the rosary after a couple of minutes what I “heard” was the people waiting for biopsy results, the husband to show up, the electricity to be turned back on, and I saw that these are the people who are sweating tears of blood with Christ in the Garden at Gethsemane.

I heard the tears of the teenage girl who is cutting herself, the child whose psychotic mother is forcing him to hold his hand over a gas stove, the women who are being raped, and these are the people who are being scourged at the pillar with Christ.

I heard the overworked heart of the CEO who opens his inbox to find two hundred messages, the day laborers wielding eardrum-shattering leafblowers for ten hours at a stretch, the twelve-year-old who must translate for her parents when

immigration services come to the door, and these are the people who are staggering under the weight of the cross with Christ.

I heard the wife who has just discovered that her husband is having an affair with the housekeeper, the farmer who is forced to sell the generations-old family farm to a conglomerate, the playwright who has poured out his heart and soul and is panned on opening night by the critics, and these are the people who are being crowned with thorns along with Christ.

All over the world, all day, every day, people are suffering, and here comes Barry, the homeless schizophrenic and hopeless alcoholic who wanders Sunset Boulevard, one grimy hand clutching a plastic bag holding his worldly belongings, the other held out in a perpetual plea for booze money. What to do in the face of such suffering? What to do with your brokenness, your weakness, your own suffering and loneliness and fear?

You give Barry a couple of bucks. You make sure to shake his hand and thank him, because this is Christ, and his heart is your heart. And you keep walking, to Mass.

Heather King is a contemplative laywoman and convert who lives in Los Angeles, CA. She is the author of three memoirs and blogs at shirtofflame.blogspot.com.