

THE OTHER MOTHERS ON CALVARY

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The day Jesus of Nazareth died on Golgotha, his was one of three crosses. Artists throughout the ages have portrayed the scene on that hill thus: the cross in the middle rises above the others and bears the innocent Savior, the other crosses bear men sentenced to death for their crimes. All four gospels narrate this event. Though Luke mentions the women who stood weeping *at a distance*, and John tells us that women, including Jesus' mother Mary, stood weeping *under* Jesus' cross, none of the gospels mention the other women who might have wept on Golgotha that day, or in the Potter's Field when Judas took his life.

The mothers not mentioned in the gospels confront me as we move into this Lenten season. Indeed, I walk with them daily, and have done so since September 18, 2001 when I became one of them. I now find myself standing with Mary, the sorrowing mother of the innocent victim, as well as with the mothers of the guilty. I walk with these women because I do not know the role my daughter played in her death, nor have the police or medical examiner been able to determine how and why she died. There are, of course, several different possibilities - none of which belong in the life of a funny, generous, and loving, but troubled young woman, the child who wept with me over the losses thousands of women experienced on September 11, 2001, and whose violent death a week later united me with them.





Before Francesca died, I mourned for those who knew their children died as victims of murder or war, accident or suicide and I wept with women who bear the burden of unknowing - those whose children's deaths remain unresolved. As a mother who loved her child unconditionally, I knew that those mothers loved their children no matter what identity those children wore to their deaths but I participated in their sorrow from a distance. I did not stand with them beneath their crosses or weep in their fields or attics or garages. Until September 18, I had not considered those other mothers who might have stood with Mary on Golgotha, grieving their shattered children on the day Jesus died. I now know that when those three crosses cast their shadows across the horizons of the earth, they united all of us who mourn.

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