

Some words for Good Friday

*Remember your mercies, O Lord,
and with your eternal protection sanctify your servants,
for whom Christ your Son, by the shedding of his blood,
established the Paschal Mystery.¹*

Readings:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalms 30:2, 6, 12-13, 15-17, 25. R. Lk 23:46

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

John 18:1-19:42

Dear Parishioner of St Joseph's & St Charles,

Crucifixion, was – and still is for some Islamic State fundamentalists who seek to practise it on their victims - a particularly barbaric way of killing someone. The victim, tied or nailed to a wooden beam, was left to hang, perhaps for several days, until eventually death came from exhaustion and asphyxiation. This year we all unexpectedly comprehend the truly awful reality of the weak, worn out human body, its lungs gasping for oxygen, literally dying to breathe. The death on the Cross suddenly seems terribly real and very personal.

The tableau of Good Friday has always captured my imagination and I have already glimpsed a few figures that will populate my reading of the story this year. It is the crowd, *the mob*, that large, angry group of people, which can so easily become violent, that I have particularly noticed. They were attacking 5G mobile phone masts the other day - setting fire to them over baseless theories that linked them to the Coronavirus. I saw them on Tuesday morning too, when the Australian High Court quashed the conviction of Cardinal Pell. Some cried out that this man was innocent and that he was being used as a scapegoat '*bearing the faults of many*,'² while others cried '*away with him!*'³ and continued to proclaim his guilt. You don't have to even be there these days to form part of the crowd; it is sufficient to simply join in online, from the comfort of your own home. You can shame a country's Chief Medical Officer if you want or express satisfaction, nay glee, at the hospitalisation of the Prime Minister and demonstrate not an ounce of compassion or sympathy; even our children have found it a useful tool at times to bully and embarrass. Finally, I have seen a few candidates for the character of Pilate washing his hands (was it for twenty seconds?) and I suspect you have too.

The great quality of the crowd is its ability to divide, to proclaim difference or deviation, and to look upon the other as opposed and distinct, *'Not this man but Barabbas!'*⁴ *'Then Jesus said to them ... for the scripture says: I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*⁵ Yet the Lord will restore us to unity and overcome all our divisions. He *'offers his life in atonement ... and through him what the Lord wishes will be done.'*⁶ By his wounds we are healed and restored, by this act of atonement with God, we are made whole for, although Easter Day is the greatest feast in the Christian calendar, it is not that day but rather this one, Good Friday, that sees a number of people make their annual or at least rare visit to a church.

This is the day that for so many, above all others, pulls at the heartstrings; the day when we commemorate an execution and lift up and exalt an instrument of torture. As *'scripture says: They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'*⁷ We stand witness to the heat and passion of the crowd, to spilt blood and degradation - *'so disfigured did he look that he seemed no longer human'*³ - before, finally, we come to the awful stillness of destruction and death, and our hearts are moved.

What seizes hold of our hearts of course is that all of that which takes place this day does so for us, for *'ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried.'*⁴ This we believe, is the whole of humanity, every single person born of woman throughout time and space. *'Pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins,'*⁵ our Blessed Lord died, *'burdened with the sins of us all,'* for the saint and the sinner, the virtuous and the vice-ridden, *'feeling our weaknesses with us ... tempted in every way that we are, though without sin.'*⁷ He, the sinless Son of God, stretched out his arms on the Cross to wash away our sins; all the pride, envy, anger, laziness, greed, gluttony and lust that can so disfigure our lives and blight our relationships. How harsh and bitter must his sufferings have been? It did not require divine foreknowledge to know, as he was mocked while yet hanging on the Cross and offering up *'prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears,'*⁸ that his sacrifice would be unappreciated and unacknowledged by many. *'There had been no perjury in his mouth,'*⁹ for he had learned *'to obey through suffering [and] became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.'*¹⁰

If we study the great crowd of humanity for which Christ died, it is soon revealed to be nothing but a collection of individuals, each with a face and a name, a story and a life, and as we continue to zoom in our focus we begin to recognise many faces that are familiar to us before finally, at the last, we come to our own place in the crowd, to *me*. When he cried out from the Cross, *'It is accomplished!'*¹⁶ Jesus died for me and for each and every one of us not as an abstract idea but as a concrete physical

existence whom he knew in the womb before we were begotten.¹⁷ Offering his perfect sacrifice on the Cross, somehow knowing and encompassing my weaknesses and inadequacies, all my faults and failings, all my sins, the Lord endured *'a punishment that brings us peace.'*¹⁸ In his death is my life, in his going to the grave I find hope.

Thank God, there is much to be hopeful for in our world. In every act of self-sacrifice the Christian is invited to glimpse Calvary and look upon it as a sign of life and love. I spoke earlier about the tableau of my imagination when considering the Lord's Passion and, if I recorded some of the more unseemly aspects of our fallen nature then, let me now offer some signs of hope also. I have already had to witness poor mother Mary and St John wretchedly forced to keep their distance from Jesus at the hour of his death and burial; though poignant and sad it was not without hope and the affirmation of the ties that bind. Even more so have I seen in the countless images and examples of doctors and nurses, healthcare workers and carers, friends and neighbours, Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus to carry his Cross and Veronica wiping his suffering face also. He has given us example and has invited us to follow, *'I was born for this. I came into the world for this; to bear witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'*¹⁹ We are after all, not passive spectators but active participants in the work of God's saving hands.

Although today, we look to the forefront of the stage, prising open the Paschal Mystery to behold the passion and death of Our Lord, nevertheless, it always remains framed by the backlight of his triumphant resurrection. For *'Christ was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all names.'*²⁰

Our Lady of Walsingham, *pray for us.*

St Joseph, *pray for us.*

St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us.*

With my prayers,

Rev. Mark McManus

Parish Priest

10 April 2020

Good Friday

-
1. *Opening Prayer, The Celebration of the Passion of The Lord, Roman Missal*
 2. Isaiah 53:12
 3. John 19:15
 4. John 18:40
 5. Matthew 26:31
 6. Isaiah 53:10
 7. John 19:37
 8. Isaiah 52:14
 9. Isaiah 53:4
 10. Isaiah 53:5
 11. Isaiah 53:6
 12. Hebrews 4:15
 13. Hebrews 5:7
 14. Isaiah 53:9
 15. Hebrews 5:9
 16. John 19:30
 17. Jeremiah 1:5 & Romans 8:29
 18. Isaiah 53: 5
 19. John 18:37
 20. *Philippians 2:8-9, Gospel Acclamation, The Celebration of the Passion of The Lord, Roman Missal*

