

GOOD FRIDAY – 2021

Standing by the Cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary of Magdala, together with John. There was no rejoicing. There would be both open and inward weeping. There was frustration and sorrow that nothing could be done to change the situation. There would be anger at the injustice and abundant love of a son, friend and companion. All the human reactions to death and loss were visible in this small group at the cross. Would they ever come to terms with this tragedy?

We can identify with this group because we may have experienced similar reactions in our lives. Yet I wonder whether we experience these reactions in our worship on this day. We have just heard St John's story of Christ's crucifixion, but are we affected by it or have we heard it so often we have become so de-sensitised to it that our head hears the words, but our feelings are unmoved.

I am not suggesting that we need to burst into tears, but do we love Jesus enough to weep internally? In the lead up to and in the Passion story of Jesus there were other occasions when tears were shed.

Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus when he was invited by Mary, his sister to go to his tomb (Jn 11:35). Did he weep for the pain of his friends, for their lack of faith or for his own coming suffering? Probably all three.

St Matthew tells us that Jesus wept internally when he approached Jerusalem for the last time before his crucifixion. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Mt 23:37).

Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he would never deny him, but he did. When he realised what he had done he "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk 22:62).

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, the mark of friendship. When he saw that events weren't turning out as he expected, he repented and tried to undo what he did declaring to the Chief Priests that, "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Mt 27:3-4). Judas was so full of despair and interior anguish, he hanged himself.

On his way to his crucifixion, Jesus met the women of Jerusalem who were weeping for him. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children" (Lk 23:28). Jesus knew that in the near future they would face great suffering at the hands of the very Romans who were leading him to his death.

Jesus carries a cross, not a sword. His power is not brutal oppression but love, even though to love is to be open to suffering. Jesus knows that he and the Father are one so within that relationship, despite the peaks and troughs of life, he is at peace. The moment of his death is a moment of creation, the agony and the ecstasy are one in Him who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2).

Perhaps the centurion wept internally when he said, "Certainly this man was innocent!" (Lk 23:47). And the crowds who had witnessed these events "returned to their homes beating their breasts" (Lk 23:48). But it was all too late. Evil had won the battle, but Love has won the war.

Are we here today as a spectator? If we are weeping at all is it because of an injustice? Or is it because we truly love Jesus and know that he loves us in spite of our shallow faith, our betrayals and our deafness to his will. Weep on and gaze upon that sacred tree, for this will be your new beginning.

'The dripping blood our only drink.
The bloody flesh our only food:
In spite of which we like to think
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood-
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

TS Eliot, East Coker IV, Four Quartets

Msgr Harry Entwistle
April 2021.