

GOOD FRIDAY

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that God might change His plans so that he might be spared the suffering He knew he was facing. His Father could intervene but He remained silent. Jesus did not choose to suffer that night, but He chose to submit to His Father's will. In the Gospel narrative, two people did not get what they deserved. Barabbas was a convicted revolutionary and criminal who deserved to die, but he was freed. Jesus urged God's people to repent and submit their will to God's, and He said that "before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). For saying these things, He was condemned. He didn't deserve what He got. Two thousand years later, things haven't changed much.

In his encyclical *Spes Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI said that "Man was created for greatness – for God Himself, he was created to be filled by God." The story of Adam and Eve explains that human desire has become distanced from God and the happiness we seek is not unity with God, but with the lesser gods of this world, some of which may be good, but they do not satisfy our longing for our creator. In the world, power, wealth, even the number of YouTube, Instagram or TikTok followers we have, indicates our status, but this kind of life ends at the grave. A self-centred life is self-contained, and in the thinking of the world even love can be self-centred, and self-centred love is capable of killing the one we claim to love. Christians are not exempt from entertaining false notions of greatness. Even SS. James and John wanted seats next to Jesus at the heavenly banquet.

Jesus was nailed to the cross because of people who in one way or another practised self-centred love. Judas Iscariot loved Jesus but thought he knew better than Him; Peter loved Jesus but wanted to save his own skin. Pontius Pilate said he thought Jesus was innocent but didn't want trouble with the Jews who finally acknowledged Caesar as king, so he ordered the crucifixion. The Jewish leaders claimed not only that they loved God but that they *knew* God – that is always a dangerous thing to say. Each one of us is capable of self-focussed love in our relationship with God as well as with other human beings, and once love is no longer central to these relationships, be they earthly or spiritual, the relationship will implode.

Oscar Wilde's poem, 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' is not based on the story of Jesus, but on the impending execution of a man who killed his wife. Even so, there are connections with the events of Jesus' Passion and our own story.

*"Yet each man kills the things he loves,
By each let this be heard.
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword.*

*Some love too little, some too long,
Some sell and others buy;
Some do the deed with many tears,
And some without a sigh.
For each man kills the one he loves,*

Yet each man doesn't die."

Oscar Wilde makes the point that there are more ways to kill a person than ending their physical life. Jesus went even further when He said that it is not only our actions that are sins, it is also our intentions. Jesus came to announce God's love for us all, yet He is the one who is crucified. In being obedient to His Father's will, He makes us face our guilt but also offers us redemption. Whenever we choose to sin we are not likely to die, but we do damage our relationship with the God who loves us, and we become hard and spiritually lifeless.

Who hung on the Cross at Calvary was not Jesus, a purely human being. Jesus was true God and true man, so on that Cross was God the Holy Trinity, together with our humanity. There on the Cross was the Word of God and that Word is Love. The outstretched arms are the open arms of the one who loves us, the one who has shared our fragile human life. He invites us to move away from our self-focus and to love Him by remaining faithful, no matter what life throws at us. This is the love that will lead to our heavenly adoration when we meet God face to face.

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