

GOOD FRIDAY YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020

WHAT IS TRUTH? CULMINATION OF JESUS' EARTHLY LIFE

Jn 18.1-19.42 Is 52.13-52 Heb 4.14-5.9

And now we gather again in faith as we commemorate the dark day of so called “Good Friday”, perhaps better expressed in Italian as “il Venerdì Santo” or French as “Vendredi Saint” (Holy Friday), and did you know it’s not even a national public holiday in Italy?! Perhaps ‘Good’ in English because it is not the end of the story of Jesus, but the beginning of the next chapter for us as believers. Once again we celebrate the tragedy and the triumph of the Jesus story and his ongoing presence with us, in this strange time for our whole global village, into which he came and immersed himself in the fullness of human life.

Here we have high drama, in the culmination of John’s account of the Passion, following Jesus’ long farewell discourse, following his washing of the feet at the Last Supper. Human folly and frailty is highlighted all the way, from the betrayal of Judas to the denial of Peter and the injustice of the whole kangaroo court, set up by the religious and political leaders of the day, in order to eliminate Jesus from the scene, once and for all.

At a time of uncertainty and relative quiet, we come to reflect on the Christian mystery, as we hear the words of John’s Gospel, prefigured by the prophet Isaiah’s account of the Suffering Servant, imaging the destiny of Jesus, as he comes to the end of his earthly life, confronted by injustice and the lies of those who rejected his message of love, peace, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet he stands firmly in control, confronted by both religious and political authorities, purporting to stand for God on one hand, and Caesar on the other.

A friend of mine commented perceptively that she believes Pontius Pilate gets far too much profile for the nasty character he seems to have been, as he gets a mention every time we say the Creed! Here in John’s Gospel, he is at the centre of the drama, confronted by Jesus, who ironically remains in control of the dialogue and is the man of truth, as Pilate asks the question **“What is truth?”** He well appreciates there is no *‘fake truth’* with Jesus, but rather the plain objective truth of his utter integrity, goodness and message. Pilate turns out to be a bit of a wimp, really, somewhat amusingly running to and fro, between the parties plotting and planning to eliminate Jesus from their scene. He even seeks a compromise in offering the release of Jesus, but the crowds resist, preferring Barabbas.

Again, the dangers of blowing in the wind, allied with bloodlust of a worked up crowd, are seen here, as a reminder to us all, not to be swayed by the spin or the propaganda, but facing up to the real truth and acting accordingly. But here, in the end, it’s the crowd, stirred up and swayed by the religious leaders, who call for crucifixion. It mightn’t have been Pilate’s preference, but he too, is swayed by and scared of the irrational crowd.

His mission complete, Jesus willingly gives his life, not so much to save us from our sins, as we are still sinning in a sinful world, 2,000+ years on, as to show us the way to face our crosses as true disciples of service and love, but not as Christian masochists, but rather as people of hope, as the crosses of life are real and painful, as we carry ours and help others carry theirs.

For John, this is a dramatic move towards the conclusion, which we await, as Jesus dies and is buried. The good and brave guys are there, in Joseph of Arimathea, who provides the tomb, and Nicodemus, who has been a searcher for faith, coming from darkness into the light, as the apostles disappear in fear, perhaps, apart from John, at the foot of the cross, with the ever faithful women, Jesus' mother and the other two Marys. And so Jesus draws us to himself as he is lifted up, according to his promise. This is not the end, a failure and tragedy in human terms, but the path to hope and new life in glory has been foretold, as we await Easter, in anticipation, despite our own natural anxiety at the present uncertain time of the Coronavirus pandemic.

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