

## GOOD FRIDAY REFLECTION 2022

### SUFFERING SERVANT, DESOLATION & DEATH, BUT THAT'S NOT THE END OF THE STORY, AS JESUS DRAWS HUMANITY TO HIMSELF

*Jn 18.1-19.42*

*Is 52.13-53.12*

*Heb 4.14-16, 5.7-9*

I'll never forget the concerned mother worrying about how to respond to her 9 year old son's real distress at the injustice of what happened to Jesus, despite the fact he had been such a good person during his life. It just wasn't fair, and was a real test of faith for both this serious thinking young chap, and so his mum too. There are no easy answers to such genuine anxiety, except to suggest that our purpose here is to live our faith by doing good, avoiding and confronting evil, seeking truth and living according to the law of love Jesus gives us. We could start with the simple call to service of others, demonstrated at the Last Supper with the symbolic washing of the feet.

And then there was a Prep student this year, in the church, expressing what many of the others might have been thinking, wondering at the image of Jesus on the Cross, ('with all that blood on him'!) and what it all meant. It is stark and confronting imagery when we think about it. Most of us older types just grew up with the Cross as part of the deal, on the wall of every classroom and in church. In Provincia offices in Treviso, I recall seeing a crucifix on the wall of the office of my friend Sandro, the chief engineer at the time.

The cross has been part of our Christian culture, understanding and imagery from the start. In our secular world of today, the significance can easily be lost, as with the jeweller's assistant, when asked for a cross on a chain, offered the buyer a plain one or one with the little man on it!

In Ontario, on Good Friday in Ottawa, the shops and restaurants were closed, while over the river in Gatineau, Quebec, it is known as Venerdi Saint (Holy Friday), everything was open. In 1986, I spent Holy Week with Scottish friends in Terneuzen, Holland, and Good Friday was a normal work day, to my surprise, so customs vary widely, in the broader secular world.

In a Tablet article, titled "*The People of the Cross*", the universal symbol of the Cross is examined thus: "*Images of the Crucifixion speak in different ways to Native Americans, to the Dalits of India and to the Copts of Egypt... All find in the Cross an image that transforms their understanding of suffering.*"

The comment is made too: "*When we see how the Crucifixion is portrayed globally, we realize the 'Word made flesh' can be portrayed in ways that transcend boundaries of ethnicity.*" Viking portrayals have Jesus as Odin, Anglo-Saxon as a warrior on the cross facing battle, Africans as a cross within a circle, a representation of this world meeting the spirit world, South Americans a '*black Christ*'. The Indian Dalits or 'untouchables', existing in poverty outside the hierarchy of so-called religious purity, "*see in Jesus' crucifixion his full humanity. Christ is understood as a Dalit both in his suffering to redeem humanity, and in his apparent God-forsakenness upon the Cross; the Cross symbolises the 'dalitness' of divinity and humanity.*" One modern image titled "*The Man on a Village Tree*" dramatically depicted Christ as still suffering alongside the poor, low-caste villagers in the rural areas of contemporary India. Then there are Coptic Christians, who get a tattooed cross on the wrist to identify themselves.

It is not a plausible argument that suffering and pain are ever good things in themselves, but the fact remains that every life has its fair share in some way or other. The old mantra "*Jesus died to save us from our sins*" might sound simple and reassuring in some weird way, but my question is why there is still so much sin and evil in the world today, as there has been from time immemorial, before and after Jesus came among us?

It seems to me more that Jesus shows us the way to confront ourselves and to deal with suffering when it comes our way, by seeking meaning, support and relief where we can. In the end, though, we all have to face our mortality.

We live in troubled times, particularly when we look at the world around us. The evils and suffering of war endure, highlighted at present by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the violence, the displacement and the horror of loss of life and injuries to so many innocent victims, with the unbelievable and unconscionable support of some in the Russian Orthodox Church, debasing the very name of Christian as a result.

**We hear John's Passion account every Good Friday, and it is full of human situations and encounters, confronting harsh reality, yet highlighting the positive side of human nature, in contrast to the darker forces that have led to this tragic, and now timeless, scene.**

There is the pointless treachery of Judas, with his 50 pieces of worthless silver and deep regret despair at his realization of the wrong he had done, all too late.

Violence is rejected by Jesus as Malchus loses his right ear, but gets it back straightaway.

The cup of suffering is to be drunk, not bypassed, as Jesus faces up to his imminent fate.

The denial of Peter in a moment of fear and weakness, then regret and distress.

There is the injustice of the setup trial before Annas, Caiaphas and then Pilate the Roman, in what amounts to a *kangaroo court*. The Law is twisted and abused, in order to justify elimination of the just and truthful one.

Jesus accepts kingship, but of justice love and peace, not power and glory, with a symbolic crown of thorns to follow.

He gives his final commission to John to care for Mary, as mother and son, while the 3 Marys stand, faithfully and mournfully, at the foot of the Cross with John.

Jesus thirsts and then the darkness of death ensues for the moment.

Faithful friends and men of faith in Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus the seeker of truth come into the light from the darkness and fear.

***“As Christians across the world prepare to celebrate Easter, all can find in the Cross and Crucifixion an image that challenges earthly power and transforms our understanding of suffering.”***

And so we prepare to celebrate life in the faith and hope of Easter.

*john hannon*

*15<sup>th</sup> April 2022*