

Good Friday

Year B

Why do we spend our time together listening to this story of pain and suffering? Isn't there enough pain and suffering in the world already? Haven't we got enough to put up with in our own lives without coming here to dwell on scenes of death and sorrow?

What does it all mean? Where is God in all of this? And why is so much attention given to one man's suffering, when so many others have suffered as much?

If we have come here on Good Friday to witness to the Passion of Jesus, it's because we've something of an answer to these questions.

We may or may not, be clear in our own minds just how we would answer them. We may have some personal experience of drawing strength and consolation from praying about the Lord's Passion. We may have a sense, or an idea of its importance for us. We may be aware that suffering and death are part of life, and that we shouldn't always try to avoid the thought of them.

As Christians we believe that the one who suffered the atrocity of the cross was the Only-Begotten Son of God. And we gather together, not only on Good Friday, but throughout the whole year, in order to remember how much he loves us, and how much he did for us.

To even begin to understand the suffering and death of Jesus we must first understand how it came about. And as we see how it came about, we understand that it is not just ancient history, something that merely happened long ago.

It is echoed and reflected in the things that happen in our world today, where people behaved then, much as they do now. Pilate represented Roman justice, the fairest, most enlightened system of justice of the day. But in some parts of today's world justice is bent and undermined to suit the conveniences of some regimes.

The soldiers who put Jesus to death were, no doubt, merely carrying out their unpleasant duty in the most efficient way. Yet in certain countries, in our own time, the military are used to terrorise, to beat, and often to torture innocent people; people whose only crime is to speak the truth, and seek fair treatment.

If only it were so clear, or so simple, maybe someone might object, "If only it were as easy, to be clear-cut in our judgements about our world as we are about the Passion of Christ".

But the ambiguity, and the moral confusion of our world, is echoed in the Gospels. Pilate clearly struggled with his conscience. Basically he was a good man who was doing evil, and he knew it. A mob may howl for someone's blood, just as the mob of people howled for Jesus' blood, and mocked him as he died. But it can also contain individuals who feel real compassion for the victim.

The parallels with the situations in the middle east, in parts of Africa, and elsewhere in the world, reported daily in our news-papers and shown on our TV's, are too striking to be missed. What happened to Jesus is like a parable, revealing, with awful clarity, what is happening in our world today.

We should not turn away from this suffering, because, to turn away from it would be to turn away from our own humanity. To blind ourselves to such awful, shameful, truth about our world, is to live a lie. We must face the mystery of this evil. And we face it, for now, without any ready answers or solutions.

With obvious exceptions, there are few truly evil people in the world. That said, there are untold numbers of people whose only crimes are small acts of selfishness, and wilful blindness to the wrong being done to others.

When added all together they add up to the terrible injustices done in the world today.

So, coming back to today... Why all the attention given to one man's suffering?

Is it just a parable for all the suffering, and wrong in the world? No, it is much more than that. We believe that, in Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father united himself to humanity.

The words Jesus spoke were those of the Father, addressed to our suffering world. The message he brought; the message of love, and of peace, and of a change of heart, *is* God's message to our world. The things that Jesus did are God's signs and gestures, to show his love for our selfish and unjust humanity.

By facing all this evil, and letting it have its way with him, Jesus was a sign of God's goodness, and of his patience in the world. He suffers with those who are suffering. He faces death with all those who are put to death. In Jesus' suffering we see the patience, and faithful love of God.

God the Father did not hesitate to give up his only begotten Son for our sakes. The Cross was the *triumph* of his love.

In the suffering and death of Jesus there is a sign of hope for our world. Evil, injustice, and death are not the end. God will bring about his Kingdom, in his own way, and his merciful love *will* have the last word.