



GOOD FRIDAY DEVOTIONAL THREE HOUR SERVICE 2020

THE WORDS FROM THE CROSS

12noon – 12.30 p.m. : **FORGIVENESS**

Hymn : There is a green hill

Reading : St Luke : 23: 33 – 38

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, '**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

Address 1 (below)

Silence



Music : 'Introit et Kyrie' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*

Poem : Indifference GA Studdert Kennedy 1883 - 1929

When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;
They crowned him with a crown of thorns, red were his wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, the human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed him by,
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give him pain,
They only passed down the street, and left him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.

Prayer

12.30pm – 1.00pm **HOPE**

Hymn : 'My song is love unknown'

Reading : St Luke 23 : 32-33, 39-43.

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, **'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'**

Address 2 (below)

Silence

Music : 'Offertoire' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*



Poem : The Thief

Anonymous 17th century

'Say bold but blessed thief,
That in a trice Slipped into paradise,
And in a plain day Stol'st the heaven away,
What trick couldst thou invent
To compass thy intent?
What arms? What charms?
'Love and belief.'



'Say bold but blessed thief,
How couldst thou read A crown upon that head?
What text, what gloss, A Kingdom on a cross?
How couldst thou come to spy God in a man to die?
What light? What sight?
'The sight of grief –

'I sight to God his pain;
And by that sight I saw the light;
Thus did my grief Beget relief.
And take this rule from me,
Pity thou him, he'll pity thee,
Use this Ne'er miss,
Heaven may be stol'n again.'

Prayer

1.00 p.m. – 1.30 p.m. **THIRSTING**

Hymn : Meekness and Majesty

Readings : St John 4: 7 – 15; 19: 28 - 29

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, **I thirst**. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

Address 3 (below)

Silence

Music : 'Sanctus' and 'Pie Jesu' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*

Poem : *Love* By George Herbert (1593 – 1633)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

Prayers



1.30pm – 2.00pm **BEING FORSAKEN**

Hymn : From heaven you came

Readings : Psalm 22: 1-2 ; Matthew 27 : 45 – 49

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** That is to say **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?** Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

Address 4 (below)

Silence

Music : 'Agnus Dei' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*



Reflection : From 'Show Me the Way' by Henri Nouwen (one-time pastor of L'Arche daybreak Community in Toronto, Canada)

Good Friday: day of the cross, day of suffering, day of hope, day of abandonment, day of victory, day of mourning, day of joy, day of endings, day of beginnings.

During the liturgy at Trosly, Pere Thomas and Pere Gilbert took the huge cross that hangs behind the altar from the wall and held it so that the whole community could come and kiss the dead body of Christ. They all came, more than 400 people – handicapped men and women and their assistants and friends. Everybody seemed to know very well what they were doing: expressing their love and gratitude for him who gave his life for them. As they were crowding around the cross I closed my eyes and could see his sacred body stretched out and crucified upon our planet earth. I saw the immense suffering of humanity during the centuries : people killing each other; people dying from starvation and epidemics; people driven from their homes; people sleeping on the streets in large cities; people alone in locked flats; in prison; people craving a gentle word, a friendly letter, a consoling embrace. People, all crying out with an anguished voice: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Imagining the naked, lacerated body of Christ stretched out over our globe, I was filled with horror. But as I opened my eyes I saw Jacques, who bears the marks of suffering in his face, kiss the body with passion and tears in his eyes. I saw Ivan carried on Michael's back. I saw Edith coming in her wheel-chair. As they came – walking or limping, seeing or blind, hearing or deaf – I saw the endless procession of humanity gathering around the sacred body of Jesus, covering it with their tears and their kisses, and slowly moving away from it comforted and consoled by such great love. With my mind's eye I saw the huge crowds of isolated, agonising individuals walking away from the cross together, bound by the love they had seen with their own eyes and touched with their own lips. The cross of horror became the cross of hope, the tortured body became the body that gives new life; the gaping wounds became the source of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

Prayers

2.00pm – 2.30pm **ON DYING WELL**

Hymn : When I survey the wondrous cross

Reading : St Luke 23 : 44 - 47

And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man*.

*Matthew and Mark report the centurion as saying, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Address 5 (below)

Silence

Music : 'Libera Me' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*



Reflection: *Jesus dies on the cross* by Michel Quoist

A few hours more, A few minutes more, A few instants more.

*For thirty-three years it has been going on.
For thirty-three years you have lived fully minute after minute.
You can no longer escape, now; you are there, at the end of
your life, at the end of your road.
You are at the last extremity, at the edge of a precipice.
You must take that last step, The last step of love,
The last step of life that ends in death.*

*You must decide, Lord, all is ready around you.
You are there, motionless, on your Cross.
You have renounced all activity other than embracing these
crossed planks for which you were made.
And yet, there is still life in your nailed body.
Let mortal flesh die, and make way for eternity.
Now, life slips from each limb, one by one, finding refuge in his
still beating heart. Immeasurable heart, Overflowing heart,
Heart heavy as the world, the world of sins and miseries that
it bears.*

*See. He has taken his heavy heart,
And, Slowly, Laboriously, Alone between heaven and earth,
In the awesome night, With passionate love, He has gathered
his life, He has gathered the sin of the world,
And in a cry, He has given all
'Father into thy hands I commit my spirit'
Christ has just died for us. Lord, help me to die for you.
Help me to die for them.*

Prayers

2.30 p.m. – 3.00 p.m. **ACCOMPLISHING HIS GOAL**

Hymn : Praise to the holiest

Readings : St John 19:25 – 27 ; 19:30;

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, '**Woman, here is your son.**' Then he said to the disciple, '**Here is your mother.**' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said,
It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Address 6 (below)

Silence

Music : 'In Paradisum' from Gabriel Faure *Requiem*

Poem : 'The Rising' by Stephen Cottrell



From the scars of passion flowers grow,
bearing fruit where life was lost and flawed.
In the desert healing waters flow,
valleys lifted, mountains now laid low,
where the heart was frozen it is thawed.
From the scars of passion flowers grow,
the mended tissue, stronger, starts to glow
like stars ablaze where pain had been ignored.
In the desert healing waters flow,
in the places where you feared to go,
release from all the bitterness you stored.
From the scars of passion flowers grow,
reconciling all you did not know,
making peace with all that was deplored.
In the desert healing waters flow,
reaping harvests that you did not sow;
where life was lost, there life has been restored.
From the scars of passion flowers grow,
in the desert healing waters flow.

Prayers

Address 1: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing

Like many people who have grown up in the Christian faith I suspect that for many, many years I tended to have a rather exalted view, a kind of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer view, of the crucifixion. In my mind's eye everything was bathed in a rosy light, our Lord was beautifully made-up, and he was raised on an exquisitely carved crucifix, towering above Calvary, just like a magnificent reredos high above a cathedral altar. But that our Lord's crucifixion wasn't like that at all, was brought home to me in a big way when one year in our old parish in South London, a group of semi-professional actors visited our group of churches to re-enact the passion. This they did very faithfully, powerfully and vividly – but the whole performance came alive, became electrifying in fact, when as the actor playing Jesus was hoisted onto a cross and was just uttering the words 'Father forgive them', he collapsed from the strain of it all. Later we found out in the mayhem that followed, including a trip to St Thomas' hospital in an ambulance, that this was the third time that day that the poor young man had had to re-enact the crucifixion.

Indeed the suffering and persecution, both physical and mental, that Jesus endured from the moment of his betrayal to the second that he died cannot be imagined. For after his arrest in Gethsemane and betrayal by one of those closest to him; then there were the trials before the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod during which his chief disciple denied ever having known him; physical beatings and scourgings followed, after which our Lord was given the cross beam to drag to the place of execution. Finally, when he arrived at the place called 'The Skull' he was stripped naked and flung down onto the rood beam with nails expertly positioned in the wrists and between the 2nd and 3rd metatarsal bones in the feet to derive the maximum pain and to prolong the agony of the victim.

And yet despite all that, when everyone had done their worst and everything was as bad as it could be, Jesus still managed to think of others and not himself by saying '**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing**'. In these words we see the victory of perfect love, triumphing over every thought of revenge or of retaliation, of self-pity or of self-interest – over all that is natural to human nature. The unconquerable compassion of Jesus goes out to all who have betrayed and deserted him; all who have mocked and condemned him; all who have persecuted and tortured him.

And who are they we might well enquire – forgive whom exactly? The Romans certainly, the soldiers and the executioners; as well as Pilate, who was between a rock and a hard place, but overwhelmed by the desire to keep the peace in that turbulent city. And the Jews as well, who had called for his death and delivered him to Pilate to be crucified. But behind the Romans and the Jews there presses the whole of humankind, for just as the city where they crucified Jesus is every city, so are his executioners all of us. Why? Well, because all that it takes for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing. And that is perhaps the greatest horror of it all : for Jesus wasn't killed by wicked people, but by so many good people, making so many little compromises, saving their own skins and failing to acknowledge the only one who could save it for them; for he was actually lifting them from the scaffolding of their own self-constructed crosses as they were putting him on his. And it goes on and on, to this very day – we call it sin, as G.A.Studdert-Kennedy - 'Woodbine Willie' - reminds us:

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed Him by.
They would not hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;

For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do, '
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall, and cried for Calvary

Nowadays it's fashionable to speak as if every wrong choice can be explained by something else – upbringing, circumstance, the very understandable effect of being hurt and wronged ourselves. But it really isn't that complicated, for we have all done things that we've known to be wrong; all said things that we know are hurtful; all fallen short of the people we want to be, let alone who God wants us to be. But on the cross Jesus deals with this. Whether we like it or not, whether we realise it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are all forgiven.

In the story of Christ's passion and death we therefore see the worst of humanity. All the hatreds, jealousies and failures that lead to his death represent the horrors and sinfulness of all the world; every wrong choice ever made, every death, every failure of love. They are gathered together into the hammering of the nails into his innocent flesh. And therefore, on the cross we see the best of humanity, humanity as it is meant to be: selfless, loving, forgiving and generous. We see humanity as it can be: redeemed by the Christ who receives the hammer blows of the nails, who reaches deep into the heart of human failure, who goes on forgiving and forgiving – because that is what true love does.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian Gospel and it's intolerable because most of us can't cope with it. We don't want it. We want somehow to make up for it, earn it, or be punished for our wrong –doings. We struggle to accept that Jesus' forgiveness is freely given. What we see in the crucifixion of Jesus is an eternal truth, as it were, revealed, advertised before us, showing us what are the consequences of our actions, and the intolerable response of God, which is forgiveness.

So as we think about Jesus' first words from the cross ***Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing*** let us ponder upon our own reactions to the way in which we respond to the idea of forgiveness.

- Are we aware of all the times we too have nailed Jesus to the cross? Like Peter denying that we are Jesus' disciples; or like the soldiers doing things we know to be wrong but excusing ourselves about simply obeying orders; like Pilate taking the easy way out of a difficult situation; like the disciples fleeing when the going gets tough; like the crowd who one day sang 'Hosanna' and then jeered 'Crucify' allowed ourselves to be swayed by peer pressure?
- Do we struggle to accept forgiveness ourselves? Are there things that we feel are too bad to be forgiven?
- Do we try to forgive other people? Are there people that have hurt us so badly that forgiveness seems impossible? Can we lay that today at the foot of the cross?

Father, forgive us.

Address 2: 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'

Whenever I hear this part of the Passion Narrative I always think back to the occasion that James and John asked Jesus 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and another at your left, in your glory' (Mark 10:37). They had of course in their minds the picture of a royal court, with themselves in places of honour either side of the king. Yet when Jesus did mount that throne of glory there were indeed one on his right hand and another on his left – but not his best friends because they'd all run away and deserted him – it was two criminals who accompanied him there. Poor James and John – if only they'd known what they were asking for perhaps they'd have been more careful about their request : a salient reminder for all of us who ask our Lord for certain things in prayer. For to ask to be near Christ in His glory was in fact to ask to be near Him on His cross.

And as for the two who were crucified alongside Jesus that day – what of them? They were both criminals, enemies of society, men who had robbed others for their own selfish ends. Indeed if it had been one of us in Jesus' place we would undoubtedly have felt and railed bitterly about the iniquity and injustice of the circumstances that had led to **our** present predicament compared with that of the two criminals, who, it might be argued, brought about and perhaps deserved their own fates. Yet Jesus doesn't wallow in self-pity or allow himself to be taken over by his own pain. For he had come to call 'not the righteous but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5:32) and even now there was still a job to be done.

Of the two criminals hanging on either side of Jesus one joined in with the mockery of the crowd. It's a sad fact that victims sometimes co-operate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims. There are always some victims who will join the bullies in victimising others. And so he rails against Jesus saying;

Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!

Because Jesus came into the world to save sinners he could indeed save the two criminals, but not without their co-operation. The thief who taunted him had no penitence in his heart – there was therefore no reply to the angry cry of the unrepentant soul. But the love of Jesus was still there waiting for the sign of love to which it could respond. This came from the thief on the other side of Jesus, who having lived a life of crime and selfishness, suddenly as death approaches, knows that he is in need of salvation.

There are two moments in this moment of truth and realisation. The first is obviously his own impending death – it's the only thing left to him – and he suddenly realises what really matters. 'Memento mori' (remember to die) the ancients used to say – what is it that really matters to you at this point? The man on the cross confronted his mortality and then he did something else – he truly looked at Jesus for the first time and was suddenly overwhelmed. He looked and looked hard – and everything else was blotted out as he gazes on the majesty, humility and strength of Jesus. The thief looks at Christ, and as the eyes of Jesus hold him, he has a moment of revelation.

We must do the same. We spend so much time looking at other faces, our minds hurtling distractedly in every direction : but if we would know and want to be freed by the truth we must focus on Jesus and look steadily at him. So we must learn to look at Jesus – maybe for the first time or maybe try to remember what it was that first drew us to him and to seek to recapture or renew that first delight in him.

The thief did so and then he made his act of faith. He knows that he can ask for no favours or rewards – his own record forbids that. All that he can do is to pray that he will not be forgotten. 'Jesus – remember me...' and back come the words of love

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise

The word 'Paradise' comes from the Persian meaning an enclosed park or pleasure garden. The original Greek translation of the Old Testament – the Septuagint – used it for the garden of Eden, and then it was developed as a super-terrestrial place of blessedness – a paradise – a place where God was. Our Lord then assured the penitent thief that that very day he would be with him after death with God in heaven – Jesus did none other than promise him life after death. Jesus therefore offers the thief and indeed all those who look at and respond to him – HOPE – hope of a new creation where sorrow and sighing and tears will be a thing of the past, where the lame shall leap like a hart and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

This should give us such comfort in the challenging times in which we find ourselves, when we are reassured that if our faith and trust in Jesus holds strong – nothing – not even death – can separate us from his care, his love and his protection. Love vanquishes everything – as we are reminded in the beautiful Easter carol – 'Love is come again'

*Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

*In the grave they laid Him, Love who had been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

*Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
Jesus who for three days in the grave had lain;
Quick from the dead the risen One is seen:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Jesus' touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green.*

Address 3: I thirst

In these two simple words, which emphasise his humanity, our Lord shares our most basic human need – that of thirst – and in this world we thirst both because we are human but also because we live in a world of sorrow. For St John however, who records this saying, there is a deeper significance to Jesus words – for he is fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 69:21 ‘in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’. Moreover, if you think about it, St John’s Gospel is full of imagery about water: in his first miracle in this Gospel Jesus changes water into wine; and then during his conversation with the woman of Samaria at the well Jesus says (John 4:13,14)

‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’

Later in the Gospel we learn that this water is the Holy Spirit which will be given after Jesus is glorified, but before that can happen Jesus has to experience true thirst. First there is his struggle with himself in the garden of Gethsemane when he’s not sure whether he wants to drink from the cup of suffering or not – ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me’... Now the struggle is over however and Jesus is eager to drink the cup to the dregs that all may be finished – I thirst.

Indeed in this word from the cross, referring to Christ’s pain, we see how he empathises with his suffering people. All of us at some point in our lives must have asked ourselves why a God of love allows suffering in his world. Sometimes, as we stand alongside others who suffer or as we endure it ourselves we may have been angry or perplexed. And we have found scant relief from philosophising and trying to reason it out. Yet whilst all the worries, doubts, frustrations and fears do not find in the cross a complete answer; nonetheless we **can** find there that which satisfies the anxious heart.

Whilst the problem of suffering is not fully resolved by the cross, it does shed sufficient light upon it to relieve the tension and anguish that we sometimes feel.

- The cross shows us that God is not ignorant of our sorrows because in the person of His son he has himself borne our grief.
- The cross shows us that God is not unmindful of our distress and anguish because by becoming incarnate Jesus suffered himself.
- The cross tells us that God is not indifferent to pain because Jesus experienced it on our behalf.
- The cross tells us most of all that no matter how far we plumb the depths of despair Jesus has been there before us and will ask of us no more than we can endure:
 - For His body was wracked with pain
 - He was misunderstood, misjudged, misrepresented
 - He spent the last three hours of his life suffering mental and physical torment – cut off from God His Father

I thirst – there is in this word also a tremendous longing for God – a homesickness for the Father, a heart-felt hunger or thirst. Have you never felt it? Have you never felt an enormous longing for God? You may not have known him; indeed you may have doubted his very existence; yet your heart hungers and thirsts. It comes to you sometimes in a dark church; in the quietness of dawn; staring at a beautiful new moon. It can come walking in the woods or downs; it can come when you see the first daffodils of Spring; it can come in so

many different ways – a sudden clutching of the heart – a thirst for God. As it says in the Psalms 42:1,2

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

As he wrestles within himself and feels cut off from the father Jesus experiences an overwhelming longing – the kind of longing that overwhelms us after a long separation from someone we love.

I thirst – finally in this word Jesus experiences a thirst for us – he longs for all of us to seek after him and to find him. He thirsts for us, and indeed there is a sense in which he thirsts for us still. He is thirsting for the love and devotion of humanity the world over. Have you ever noticed that although Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink, he never actually had a drink of water? I like to think that that was because in the faith of that Samaritan woman He found that which refreshed His heart – for love is never satisfied until there is a response – and love pledged in return. So Jesus will remain thirsty until all humanity has found the fountain of living water.

Here is the key to Revelation 3: 20 - *Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*

This is the text below the St Paul's version of Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World'. Notice that it is a communal eating – not only do we eat with him, he eats with us. Christ finds in communion something which refreshes him and that something is devotion and love. Yes – Jesus still thirsts for the love and devotion of humanity, but hearing him say – I thirst – should make us ask ourselves – do I offer Him refreshment for His thirst? Does my devotion and love help to quench his thirst for others?



Address 4: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

To be forsaken is to be cut off from what gives our life meaning and beauty, what holds our life together, what makes us continue. Some of us who have plumbed the depths of despair might have **some** insight into what Jesus experienced at this ghastly moment when he felt his Father withdraw, but this must have been a unique level of dereliction. For Jesus defined himself by his closeness to God. He spoke of God as his Father – often he took himself off alone to pray to the Father – he lived as if he always had the father in his sights. ‘He that hath seen me hath seen the Father’; ‘I and the Father are One’ he said. There was a union between them that was total – they pulsed together. Our creeds describe it as a total identity – ‘being of one substance’.

Indeed it was this communion with the Father that sustained Jesus and gave him the courage to endure everything that the world threw at him. It had sustained him against every temptation to disobey the Father’s will. Here he is now, forsaken by all in the world, forsaken even by his disciples. Only his mother, and his beloved disciple and two other women were nearby but he could not reach even them. He was perhaps only raised up eighteen inches above the bystanders – yet an infinity of distance separated him from them. Nonetheless he was still sustained by his Father. And then suddenly, in an instant, the ground of his inner security disappears.

God withdraws. The only thing that had kept Jesus together is completely taken away. He is totally forsaken. Suddenly he feels absolutely bereft, even of God. The tense of the verb is very specific, an aorist, which is punctiliar in sense. It happened in a flash. Jesus isn’t describing a general condition but a moment, a stab or a thunderbolt. God goes forth from himself – un-Gods himself. God submitted himself to a forsakenness, a desertion of his own nature, for our sakes. Indeed this is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus personally addresses God as ‘God’. Not Abba – daddy – not Father – but God --- the distance is palpable.

Moreover it’s such a stark contrast with the opening verses of St John’s high priestly prayer when Jesus says ‘Father glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you’. How does the Son glorify the father if the latter forsakes him when he needs him most? Jesus might have been prepared to be ‘lifted up’ on the cross to glorify His father, but was he prepared to be forsaken as well? We can only wonder...

So why did Jesus have to undergo such a sense of abandonment? We can only puzzle, but it may be because in order to redeem everything in the universe Jesus had to plumb the depths. It is as if our Lord went to the very bottom of history, and became identified with it, uniting himself to it and by so doing, redeemed it. By bearing it he transformed it, and in so doing we are assured that Jesus will never ever ask of us anything that he hasn’t undergone himself. Jesus takes everything that the world and God throws at him, endures it and thereby redeems it. This is the epicentre, the total eclipse, the murder of God, which gave us life in a sense beyond definition.

How can we possibly enter this experience? Most of **us** experience forsakenness as something external to ourselves, however close the person who has forsaken us may have been. The experience of a condition such as schizophrenia in some form perhaps must afford something by way of an analogy – a sense of being torn apart within oneself. But it's poetry that perhaps helps us best here. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who towards the end of his life suffered acute spiritual crisis penned this:

NO worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing—
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief'.

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Hopkins' experience can help us approach the reality of that moment on the cross when God forsook his Son.

And what then of us when we feel forsaken? Surely it helps in *our* own dark nights of the soul to recall that Jesus underwent a sense of complete desolation when his life-line to God seemed to fracture just when he needed it most. Moreover it is a comfort also to know that Christians of such stature as Mother Teresa have also experienced this sense of forsakenness. Since the publication of her private writings in 2007 the world has come to see that Mother Teresa's commitment to the poor continued for almost 50 years of her life whilst she struggled with a feeling of having been abandoned by God. Amongst the most tortured of her cries is this:

Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me?...I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One.—Alone. The darkness is so dark—and I am alone.—Unwanted, forsaken.

Perhaps then we should clutch at this sense of utter forsakenness and pay attention. If we do it will deepen our pity and compassion for others, but it will also afford us a moment of identity with Jesus, who was forsaken by his father in order to restore us to our rightful place in God's heart.

***Address 5: Jesus : 'Father into thy hand I commend my spirit'
The centurion's response : 'Truly this man was God's Son'***

One of the most difficult tasks when taking a school 'Collective Worship' at this time of year, is to convince the children that this is really *is* Good Friday – as they just can't get the association. To them – it's obviously 'Bad Friday' because Jesus was unjustly put to death on the cross. How then can it possibly be 'good'? I have some sympathy with this difficulty, especially when at the end of a busy Holy Week, come 3 pm on such a Friday we are left with a yawning void until early on Easter Day. Moreover if we've focussed upon the way in which Jesus has been betrayed, denied and abandoned by those he loved the most; if we've reflected upon the fact that he has been spat upon, flogged and condemned; and if we've thought about how on the cross he suffered the worst trauma of all – feeling that His Father God has forsaken him – then it's not at all easy to return home feeling cheerful and uplifted. Such a mind-set tempts us to view the cross as a disaster which needs the resurrection on Easter Day to reverse the tragedy. Such a mind-set tempts us to *fear* death and to shy away from thinking about it.

However there is an alternative way of viewing Jesus' uplifting on the cross – a way which is far more inspiring and in keeping with the concept of this being 'Good' Friday. For a start it is clear in all four Gospels that Jesus knew that he would die in this way from at least half way through his ministry, and that he went willingly to his death. Indeed in St John's Gospel Jesus is clear about the manner of his being uplifted from the outset of his public ministry. In the other Gospels Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the manner of his death from about the time of the confession at Caesarea Philippi. So it's not as if Jesus happened to be in Jerusalem and everything went pear-shaped. Jesus tried to prepare those closest to him for this eventuality, and was clear that this was what he was called to do. It was a voluntary act. It was not to be seen as a disaster as if it was something that befell Jesus unexpectedly. Rather it should be seen as a triumph over sin and suffering, and a reversal of the way in which the world viewed such a death. As we hear in St Luke :

'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'.

Rather than being defeated by the cross, Jesus reigns from it, such that it's not a catastrophe requiring the reversal of the resurrection but a victory that Easter Day confirms and seals.

The victory concerns both sin and suffering. Sin has done its worst but here is righteousness undefeated. Suffering has done its worst but Jesus has so used it as to transfigure it. They met their match in Jesus. The glory then is here, and for all time believers may in faith draw upon the victory of Jesus – sin conquered and suffering transfigured. By freely choosing death and going through with it obediently to the end, Jesus reversed the tragedy of all dying.

What confirms this interpretation is firstly that Jesus has come through his sense of isolation and found God again – now not forsakenness but 'Father into your hands...' – his sense of unity with his father has returned. But what's more is the effect that Jesus' death has upon the centurion. For when that centurion stood facing Jesus, and saw the manner in which he died he proclaimed:

Truly this man was God's Son.

This is his response to the death of Jesus. In St Mark's Gospel up to this point this title 'Son of God' has only been spoken by the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism and at his Transfiguration, or by unclean spirits. In fact the words 'Truly this man was God's Son' form the climax of Mark's Gospel for they are the words used in the confession of Christian faith, and they are found in the mouth of a Gentile at the moment of Jesus' death. The ultimate irony is that this was Jesus' executioner. But for Mark the centurion's confession confirms the Father's voice when Jesus was baptised at the start of his ministry as being his 'beloved Son'. And what's more it is Jesus' death on the cross that inspires his very executioner to become a disciple. So this is where everything that Jesus did in his life gains its meaning. Moreover this is where everything that *we* do in *our* lives is judged and finds its meaning.

To worldly eyes Jesus has died and it's bad Friday; but for those with eyes to see, Jesus has triumphed and completed the work that his Father set him upon this earth, and it's most definitely a good Friday. This is the end of the race for Jesus; and he bursts through the finishing tape. Divinity now is perfectly united with humanity. The God who emptied himself through love to become human has now plumbed the depths of human experience. The one who shared our birth now also shares our death. Reconciliation with God is achieved. We are made whole; we are healed. We do indeed then need to stand at the foot of the cross for here we are known as nowhere else and here all creation is made new, whole and brought to completion.

The cross then is not a defeat which needs the resurrection to reverse it. Rather it is a victory so signal the Easter comes quickly to seal it. Sin and suffering have met their match in Jesus and he triumphs over them. The glory is here on the cross – sin conquered, suffering transfigured. How did Jesus manage to achieve it? Through love – they did their worst and he still loved them in such a way as even his executioner declared him to be God's Son. And he extends that love to us, inviting us both to become his disciples ourselves, and to go and make disciples of all nations.

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

This then is the challenge of the cross to us – to live as those who truly believe that Jesus is God's Son, and to make that manifest in the lives we lead. For our vocation is to be the people of the cross: tenacious lovers, persistent in our generosity, resolute and obedient to building God's kingdom in the world.

On the cross we see the perfect love of God revealed in painful detail : a tenacious, resolute and persistent love; a love that goes the second mile, that turns the other cheek, that will not coerce or give way – a love that triumphs. When we read the story of Christ's passion, or look at a cross, or simply imagine what Jesus endured on that first Good Friday so long ago, we see the immense capacity of God to go on loving. We also see that all this was achieved for us. And now we must do the same. Our words and our lives must mesh together if we would be followers of God's Son, Jesus. We then are called through the way in which we live out our lives to make disciples – to enable others to see in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. How do we do it?

Well on this Good Friday perhaps a good way to start would be to trace the mark of the cross on our bodies, and to commit ourselves anew to fulfilling God's cause in the world.

Address 6: Woman here is your Son ... here is your mother
It is finished

It is finished - every year Lent brings us inexorably to this point. This is where everything Jesus did in his life gains its meaning. This is where everything **we** do in our lives is judged and finds its meaning. He was taken, blessed, broken, and now he is given, handed over to death for our salvation. We can share his sufferings; we can grieve with his mother and the beloved disciple as they stand at the foot of the cross; and we can give thanks for our redemption – because now we know that God loves us – this is the evidence – this the proof.

What's more is that this is a shout of joy not of defeat, for the Greek used by St John, the verb τετελεσται, means both 'its ending' but also 'it's accomplished/achieved/fulfilled'. It's one of those word games that St John delights in because he wants his readers to ponder more deeply on its meaning. To worldly eyes Jesus has died; but to those with eyes to see, Jesus has triumphed and completed the work that he came to do upon the earth. This is the end of the race for Jesus and he bursts through the finishing line. 'It is finished' then is a phrase that should echo gloriously and never be muttered sorrowfully.

It is finished – the new creation he came to introduce has begun through the giving of Mary his mother into the care of his beloved disciple. As he hangs from the tree, forced there by the choice made by a man and woman by a tree in Eden, Jesus creates a new world. Here we have a man and a woman being obedient, bound together by a new relationship, given not by nature but by the love and obedience of Jesus. Here is the beginning of God's plan for a redeemed world – the vision of restored relationships that the church should show forth to the world. Here is the hope of the poorest, the weakest, and the loneliest. In the forging of this new relationship Jesus calls his church, as his body, to be a sacramental presence in the world. To create a space where the suffering are comforted, where praise and blessing are offered, where new life is celebrated and loving service is given freely and joyfully, by those who rejoice in knowing God.

It is finished – the God who emptied himself in love to become human has now plumbed the depths of human experience. The one who shared our birth also now shares our death. Not only is reconciliation between human beings achieved but reconciliation with God is also won. We are made whole; we are healed. We do indeed then need to stand at the foot of the cross, for here we are known as nowhere else and here all creation is made new, whole and brought to completion.

What this means is that God in Christ recapitulates humanity's history – in Christ our whole human experience was re-run but this time properly. Our tragedy is our disobedience, our resistance to reality, our pettiness. Jesus however triumphed through his obedience; his complete grasp of reality and his devotion to the truth and things that matter. By his obedience he justifies us. The great word that the early church used to describe this is 'recapitulation'. Everything was done again in Jesus who brought completion, healing and fulfilment to this world.

Jesus is lifted up in glory – let us shout for joy – worldly values are overturned and transformed. As F.W.Krummacker put it:

At these words you hear the fetters burst and prison walls falling down, barriers as high as heaven are overthrown, and gates which have been closed for thousands of years again move on their hinges.

This then is not a defeat which needs the resurrection to reverse it but such a significant victory that Easter comes quickly to seal it; and the victory is over both sin and suffering. Sin has done its worst but here is righteousness undefeated. Suffering has done its worst but Jesus has so used it as to transfigure it. They met their match in Jesus and the glory is here, such that for all time sinners and sufferers may in faith draw upon the victory of Jesus – sin conquered and suffering transfigured.

How did Jesus do it? Through love – they did their worst and he still loved them. And he extends that love to us. He can't and won't make us love him, but he will wait forever in the hope that we might love in return. And even if we don't, even if no-one does, it doesn't change what he has done; it doesn't stop him loving.

This is how Bishop Stephen Cottrell sums it up:

To walk the Christian way is to live as those who turn to Christ, who return his love. This way begins with the free response of the human spirit to the love of God. It is marked in the waters of baptism. It needs to be renewed every day. It cries out to be manifest in the lives we lead. Our vocation is to be the people of the cross: tenacious lovers, persistent in our generosity, resolute and obedient to building God's kingdom in the world.

What can love do? Well, all that love can do is to go on loving. It has no choice. It either loves, or it stops being love. On the cross we see the perfect love of God revealed in painful detail: a tenacious, resolute and persistent love; a love that goes the second mile, that turns the other cheek, that will not coerce or give way – a love that triumphs.

When we read the story of Christ's passion, or look at a cross, or simply imagine what Jesus endured on that Friday afternoon long ago, we see the immense capacity of God to go on loving. We also see that all this was achieved for us. It was for our salvation that God thirsted so much. And now we must do the same. We place our hands in the living water, we trace the mark of the cross on our bodies, and we commit ourselves to God's cause in the world.