

When Jesus told the Jews he was going where they could not follow him, they asked themselves if he were contemplating suicide. Now we find him telling his own disciples that *they* will not accompany him either, and this is what provokes Peter's famous declaration of loyalty. But it isn't what it seems. In fact, Peter has no intention of dying with Jesus, and every intention of not letting Jesus die either; he has carried a concealed weapon ever since *Get behind me, Satan!* - and now it looks as if it will come into play. A sword will be drawn, but only to be dismissed contemptuously by Jesus, who could have been defended by legions of angels if it were the Father's will.

The *inability of Peter to understand* and his *unfitness to accompany Jesus* are the same thing. And he stands for all of us, priests, deacons, Popes (of which he was only the first to lose the plot) and the whole body of the faithful; we have always known better than God. We have better plans, we know better how things ought to be arranged, and we spend acres of life and kilojoules of energy on worthless projects which have nothing to do with the real way in which the world will be saved.

The aloneness of Jesus in the Passion is God's plan, and it is therefore just and right. He stands, falls, dies and is buried alone, because there is no-one who is fit to stand near to him. The sleeping disciples in the garden give perfect form to their helplessness.

When we see this solitude broken, we can find a way in for ourselves. I think of three ways in which we might be allowed to draw close.

There is the *wordless physical help* of Simon of Cyrene, a pressed man forced to help. We are privileged to help those on the Way of the Cross, even when we can't find a word of explanation for it, even when we have our work forced out of us protesting.

There are the forms of those whose love for him takes the form of *pure discipleship*: his mother, and the Beloved Disciple. Their love licenses them to be at the foot of the Cross: wordless again, watching silently the mystery that is beyond even them.

Finally, there is *the one who has lost everything* in this world through his own acknowledged sins, and he finds a community with the dying Jesus that is fully conscious and spelt out in human language: they are at one, because they are sharing the same fate.

Notice what qualifies these people to be near to Jesus. It will be easier for us to be close to him, if we forget about our gifts or our wisdom, and remember our needs, and our ignorance, our slavery, and our sins. In these things, we are *all* qualified to be here.