

We come tonight to a kind of personal gateway into the mysteries of Holy Week. We stand on the threshold of these gigantic mysteries: the love of God which underlies and embraces all the meanings of the Universe, and the tremendous sweeping tide of the Incarnation, reaching its lowest point as the Son of God brings the power of salvation into the depths of human experience: rejection, condemnation, agony, physical pain, shame and death itself.

But these awesome mysteries are not to be celebrated only on the world-scale liturgy which we know they inspire; that phrase in the Palm Sunday Mass, which spoke of our being gathered as a Church through all the earth was right; the tide of God's mercy has to reach and overbrim the humblest and most personal of our barriers, that fence around the heart that keeps us from the force of salvation: our little spoiled garden of much humbler truths, the place we can truly call our own. If the power of Christ is to reach and save the world, he must enter even the lowest place of our own hearts and lives. We aren't saved as nations, or races, or even tribes; we are saved as unique and uniquely-loved souls, any one of whom would have been enough to bring the Lord from highest bliss to suffer beside him or her, and to turn one life into a place of eternal joy.

We are asked a small sacrifice in this, but it is still a vital one: to enter the dark in our own life, and to seek there for the deserted grave where we have buried our hope in God's promises. The Saviour has been given his orders, that he is to lose nothing of all that the Father has given him. He must stand before the grave where his beloved mourns, and call out those who are imprisoned by evil, by despair, by disappointment and by their own record of sin. It was for this that he came to be born as one of us, so that the loving God could look out of human eyes and see human poverty, the grief which takes possession when sin and death have begun to reign in us.

Listening to the story of the Last Judgment, we may be overwhelmed by fear; but the words of Jesus are never directed towards inspiring fear. See how he tells us that those who are blessed of the Father are just as unconscious of their destiny as those who are damned. There are few of us who could honestly say that they had lived a life refusing to feed the hungry or give drink to the thirsty, or had consistently slammed the door in the face of the homeless or refused to reach out and give a little dignity to those the world has stripped of it. Few of us could be accused of regularly keeping our distance from the sick or the condemned. It is only that we have not known that it is in these things that we were meeting Christ. If there have been times when we have closed our hearts against the needy, and isolated ourselves in what we called security and comfort, then we know what our confession must be tonight, and we know where the joy of God has yet to make inroads into our sad life.

God has called us to see our struggle for holiness in simple and homely terms; and when we do this, we know that everything simple and homely in us has been caught up in the divine flood of mercy and redemption that is sweeping God's world. Let this service of repentance be our coming to inherit the vision of Jesus, who rejoiced to pour out his whole life, so that we might know the totality of the Father's love for us, and the endlessness of our hope.