

Habbakuk is not a well-known prophet. But his words always come back to me very specifically when something happens that I don't understand, and about which I need to trust God.

Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read;
Since this vision is for its own time only.
Eager for its own fulfilment, it does not deceive;
If it comes slowly, wait for it: for come it will without fail.

These words for me are exceedingly precious, because all my life I have seen visions, those that are granted to me and those granted to others, and watched them perish for what seemed incontrovertible reasons. I may have been quite sure that what I saw was what God wanted, and still have to swallow a world where what God wanted was never going to come to pass.

One response to this experience is anger. Anger gives rein to all the resentment and bitterness that flows from lost beauty, wasted chances, blighted human hope. In a life given to idealism it is almost certain that we have to cope with this urge to despair, to hatred, to violence. If you expected nothing good or beautiful in your life, it would be much easier and less painful; hope for nothing, receive nothing, and at least you have the satisfaction of knowing that you were right; and your heart will never be ravaged by the pain of disappointed hope and love unrequited. What a victory over life! If you hang on to your ideals, you will have the pain of knowing defeat and sometimes disaster. And you will pray: *Where are you, Lord? Why have you forsaken me?*

Instead of that, Jesus gives us a draught of cold water in the face. The wilting apostles ask him to ease their pain, to give them something to stop the agony. But he says, *In the plan of God your hopes and desires are short of wisdom, poor in vision. If things seem to you to go badly, and even if things seem to go well, you must remain trustful and not vainglorious. Because in the end you are not architects or patrons of your salvation. You are servants of God, who alone knows the way in which salvation will come.*

The God of the enslavement of Israel, the God of the Babylonian exile, the God who let Antiochus Epiphanes destroy Israel, is the God who brings Jesus to Gethsemane, and to Calvary, despite his agonised prayer. The real way in which God will save our people does not lie in grandiloquent preaching, followed by universal repentance, and characterised by massive attendance in Church. Instead, it lies in the prayer, *thy will be done*, and the crucifixion of the beloved Son. Anything that does not match that path is not good prayer. So when (if ever) you have done all that has been asked of you (and I know I haven't) you must say *We are servants, not masters; we have done our part, and it is for God to do his*. Let us not be disheartened by any sense of disappointment. We are servants; Jesus was a servant; and until we have seen our hopes nailed to a cross, we shall not have followed him to perfection.