

# Good Friday

We live in uncomfortable times, times when we have come to doubt what we are here for. For some people this is an experience which they find totally awful: they long for the securities of their childhood, or the childhood of their grandparents: for a time when people knew what they believed in, and what their values were. It sometimes seems today that we each have to invent a set of values, and impose our personal shape on the world. This makes the world unbearably lonely, since we never know who will share our views, our understandings, our hopes. Sometimes we can feel we're living in a world with only one inhabitant. For the Church, which must be a community of shared faith, hope, and love, it is a strange time.

But this feeling is not unknown to the Church, and it is particularly right today. Why do we call this a *good* day, when the love and kindness of God seemed thrown back in his face, when human beings set up the most ghastly sign of rejection, a day of cruelty, torture and death?

I think it is precisely because *everything is overturned* on this day that we call it good. All those who take part in the evil deeds we read in the Passion find themselves losers today. Pilate fails to keep the peace, and is forced to deface his record with an unjust verdict, an ugly martyrdom. The priests and scribes are punished for this, when Pilate groups them with their victim, and calls a crucified man their king. Judas the betrayer dies in despair. Peter the champion departs in shameful tears. The crowd go home shaking their heads. It is as if no-one emerges with any credit from the human plots and counterplots which *seem* to be responsible for this ghastly drama.

What if we have tried to keep a good Lent, if we have tried to stay with Jesus as he teaches us his way, if we have watched and prayed with him: can we be any more confident as we stand at the foot of the Cross? Like Peter, we have been unable to prevent his death, re-enacted in our world again and again; and we have little claim to high moral ground, knowing the weakness of our fidelity, our readiness to be bowled over and join the mob. On this day, we too are overturned and powerless before the mystery.

But if we have no power to cleanse this day, if we have no plan that will redeem us and this story, we are not to despair. Because what we are always leaving out of account is the nature of this story as a *divine* plan. Our sense of powerlessness is totally human: it may make us look modern, just like the people around us who have lost their bearings, and say that all faith is a fable. But God has *not* lost his bearings, and on Good Friday he shows them most powerfully to us. We are not here to find a solution to what has happened. We are certainly here to accept that we do not have a solution. But it is this sense that lays us open to God, and to his total sovereignty over the gift of life. Pilate *would have had no power over Jesus, if it had not been given him from above*. It is God the Father who hands his Son over to the world, and when we have done our worst to him, when we have reached the end of all our devices and desires, it is God who will speak to us, and tell us what the story really means. This is a good day, if we surrender our self-possession, and *wait in silence for the Lord to save*. Tomorrow night we shall hear the voice of God, the one Jesus called *My Father*, and we shall listen to what he has to say, when all our voices have fallen silent, and our words of death have done their worst.