

Good Friday

Today, I think, every Christian priest and minister in the world will be trying to say in a lot of words what Good Friday means, and why it is that we have built our lives around it. Some people, sincere Christians, do not accept that we have, and speak of the Resurrection as the heart of Christianity, since the Resurrection is good news (gospel) and the Crucifixion is not.

I would say to them that they are literally getting ahead of themselves, and confusing the human with the divine. Let us not lose our way: *our* business is to do what humans do; *God's* business is the work of God. The Resurrection is a divine deed, experienced by a human being. The Cross is a human deed experienced by God. So let us remember who does what on this day.

The betrayal of Jesus is carried out by a consortium. That one member is Judas, a disciple who sold him, has always sent a cold shiver down our spines. But let's remember the others: the High Priest and his family, together with the massed ranks of the Sanhedrin of Israel: if the Archbishop of Canterbury and both Houses of Parliament had sanctioned Judas' deed, would we have called it treachery? Luke tells us that King Herod was briefly concerned in the deed. The weak but final authority of the Roman Empire is also involved, with the prefect Pontius Pilate failing to intervene. Finally, the common people of Jerusalem call for his death, and in some sense they represent us. We too are involved, through this crowd which is so like us.

Why did we do it? I think we did it because we have, deep inside us, a voice of death that contradicts his message. When we say the Creed, we say that we want this to be a created world, with a purpose enshrined in the heart of its almighty Creator: we say we want there to be a plan for our eternal happiness, that we want to believe that human nature is created good and will one day be made perfect by sharing its Creator's life and joy.

But the voice which speaks deep within us, like a murmuring spring of despair, whispers doubt and negativity, tells us to snatch the nearest swag and run; urges us to narrow selfishness as the only response in a bitterly cruel world. This voice is so deep - *and so much our voice* - that again and again we secretly shake our head at the Gospel, and go a different way.

When a man comes and tells us the truth, following it himself with obvious sanctity, and opening our nature to the power of grace, we don't merely turn *from* him: we turn *against* him; because his message will deny that worldly voice which we have come to trust, and upset the world we've built around our despair. He will call us to follow him into a different world built round his love, and, if we do, all our investment in the violent and hating world we have accepted will be worthless. It will be such a long way to retrace our steps! It will cost us the confession that we have been wrong.

So what will we say to this man, who asked us to sell what we have and invest in heavenly treasure? We've got to make some response: and indifference won't be enough. We have to show him how his gospel and his way will end, and we send him to the cross to teach him. In this we also raise an ikon for ourselves: this, we say, is what we think of human nature that tries to love to the end. And, astonished, we suddenly realise, *this is what we think of*

ourselves. Take a good look at the crucified one. Read what we have written in his flesh about him, and about ourselves.

The Chief Priests were sending their message too: *this is what we do with blasphemers* - those who say that God can live a human life, come to be our brother. The Romans send their message: *this is what we do with trouble-makers and terrorists and Kings of the Jews*. The disciples send no message, because in today's Gospel Jesus has sent them away: they may not come with him, because they do not understand.

But we are looking in the wrong place for the meaning of Mount Calvary. We must lift up our eyes to the mountains. Because above and beyond all of this human understanding, the ikon of the Cross is not a human message, but a divine one. God says: *This is what you do to me when I come to you in love, come to be your brother. This is what you think of me. I am ready to come and suffer this, so that you will see how faithful I am to you*. So let us look long and hard at the one we have crucified. Realise that he has done this to make himself into a gift. Read in his flesh - which makes him our brother - and see in it the realest gift we will ever receive- the ultimate gift of God.