

Good Friday 2007

If we are useful, people are constantly contacting us, asking us to help, to inform, to sympathise, to be who we are to them. This is affirming, but also exhausting. We can come to feel that this is all we are. A mother with young children can come to think of herself as just a functionary in their lives; a carer for a disabled person, a nurse in a hospital, a priest in a parish, a teacher in the classroom can all feel identified with the good they do.

But there are vast areas of our being that are not in this picture. The mother needs to be loved for herself. The carer must have someone to care for him. The nurse must have her own hurts bandaged, her own pain soothed. Even a priest in a parish needs to be fed, forgiven, reconciled, and inspired. A teacher needs to be taught, to have time for the personal wonder she wants to inspire in her pupils.

Each of us needs human care. But we need more than human care. We need hope that no human hand, however generous, can give: hope for eternity! We need forgiveness that comes from the Maker who designed us. We need the love of God, who called us into being with all our weaknesses and failings; we need the great Heart to open toward us, which has our happiness securely held and promised.

This is what happens today.

The God who calls you to himself today asks nothing of your labour, your talents, or your gifts. He himself is past being fed, or comforted, or enriched by any other human being. He shows you the heart of God: totally given for you, as totally as any human being could give: *no-one has greater love, than to lay down his life for those he loves*. This God speaks our language, in our accent; he dies condemned, as we are condemned; he dies in agony, as we live in dread of pain. He is naked of honour or respect, as we suspect we are. He dies poor, as we always feel we are poor. He dies, above all, in love: so selflessly rich in love, that our hungry and voracious life seems like death in comparison. So let no vanity of ours rob us of communion with him today, as he pours out his life so utterly for us.

We have been trying to come to terms with this crucified God for so many centuries, and we each in our own way only begin to enter into the mystery of him. Every saint has tried to be like him: some have imitated his poverty, some have tackled the pain of his brothers and sisters, on the long Way of the Cross that is the world's history. Some have laid down their lives heroically, dying of the world's hatred or failure to understand or to believe. Some have tried to penetrate his meaning by prayer and thought, and have taken the dark paths of solitude and mysticism: some, with the marks of his cross in their hands and feet. We have all tried to learn, from his compassion and faithfulness, how best to care for each other, on our way home to the Father. Today the Church points every human soul toward him, and says:

*This crucified man is the God you seek.
This crucified God shows you your own humanity.
Come, let us worship.*