

When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent messengers to Jesus to ask whether he were truly the Messiah or not. In this we can sense the urgency of John the Baptist's fearful situation.

Many of us have prayed in the same spirit. There is an edge of impatience when we are young, and perhaps of panic when we are older: *Lord, where are you when we need you?*

Jesus responds to John the Baptist by pointing to his miracles: the signs of the Messianic era - the marvellous transformation of faithful lives - are all appearing. But his last words to John are the most important: *Happy is the man who does not lose hope in me.*

John the Baptist, along with the disciples of Jesus, knew nothing about the Cross. He might have drawn distant comfort from the knowledge that, where Jesus of Nazareth went, *the blind see again, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news preached to them.* But the true nature of the Christ and of his coming was hidden from all of them. And it is the true nature of the Christ that could have made sense of John the Baptist's lonely fate in a dark prison at Caesarea. For that time, he was obliged to make a very pure act of faith, because he could not see the mystery which would answer his prayer.

But we, who celebrate the Paschal season of resurrection, we do know about the Cross. We can already say that our act of faith includes all the evil that can befall us just as clearly as the joy we hope to inherit. When we make our act of faith in Christ, it is not faith in one who will prevent our suffering, but on the one who will actually lead us into it, and through it, and beyond it.

So for Thomas:

We do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

- Jesus' answer is the same:

*I am the way, the truth, and the life;
no-one can come to the Father except through me.*

It is sheer grace to be able to look to Christ from the furnace of human pain, and to trust him as the *crucified* Lord. That is the suffering that purifies us, like gold melting from the rock, and running pure into the crucible. If we can confess that we know little of the destination of Jesus, and that the way he leads us is filled with terror and uncertainty, so much the better for our faith, which is made generous and sometimes heroic, as it courageously confronts the darkness.

Pray for James Heneage and his family, that their faith may not fail.