

Good Friday 2020

Last Sunday the king was welcomed to Jerusalem, today is his coronation. It is like no other, neither before nor since has a person been pronounced a sovereign by being crowned with thorns and enthroned on a device designed purely for torture and death. It is this event which lies at the heart of the Christian understanding of God it is an event has haunted the imagination of generations and even in our secular age the cross retains its drawing power.

Even in our day when Biblical literacy is at a low ebb, many folk know of the account of Adam of Eve a story which, like the cross, looms large in our psyche. It continues to capture the imagination of men and women seeking to make sense of the human condition and to answer some of the big questions: Why does everything go wrong, where do we fit in the big scheme of things and what are our responsibilities, what is it with shame, why are the sexes like they are, so attracted to each other and why do women put up with men (and vice versa)! Why do we find snakes so loathsome, why do we blame each other when things go wrong, why are we always on the move and what shall we say when God asks 'where are you?'

The fall, as this account is known, is not just something which happened long ago, in the beginning, in Genesis. The fall is happening now in the present all over the world in every aspect of life, in the relationships between men and women, humankind and nature, humankind and God. Our current isolation from one another speaks volumes about the issues that plague us. The cross is *the response* to the fall. It is why we call today *Good Friday*.

Today is good because God in Christ comes among us to do two things. One is to take responsibility for the fall as St Peter tells us: he bore our sins in his own body on the tree, the other is to take responsibility for the creative

activity of God – God who on the cross was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, as St Paul tells us. This is why Christian faith is both comfort and challenge in equal measure. I say that the cross is *the response* to the fall deliberately, it is not the answer. Attempts to explain or offer answers to the problems which beset our world will always fall short.

Love not explanation is called for when we are faced with the tragedies of this world. This is our task which is both made possible *and* demanded of us by the cross. It is both comfort and challenge; comfort in the knowledge that our part in the tragedies of our world will ultimately come to nothing in the resurrection and challenge in that we are called to be a part of the new creation, redeemed.

This Good Friday carries with it a poignancy rarely felt. The isolation which is being required of us is an anathema to the very idea of the faithful, gathered. One theologian wrote on isolation: The hospital is, after all, first and foremost a house of hospitality.... It is our sign that we will not abandon those who have become ill. ... If the hospital, as too often is the case today, becomes but a means of isolating the ill from the rest of us, then we have betrayed its central purpose and distorted our community and ourselves.

This Good Friday we have before us a reminder of the fear that stalks us, and the pain of isolation. It is distorting us, but I pray that in the cross we will find the comfort that sustains us and the challenge to continually find new ways in which we might be join in Christ's reconciling act of love.

The king has today been crowned and enthroned. The royal banners forward go, the cross shines forth in mystic glow. O Tree of beauty, tree most fair, ordained those holy limbs to bear. Gone is thy shame, each crimsoned bough, proclaims the King of Glory now. To Thee, eternal Three in One, Let homage meet by all be done, as by the cross Thou dost restore, so guide and keep us evermore. Amen.