

Passion Sunday

Romans 8.6-11

John 11.1-45

Collect

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen

Passion Sunday Address

Perhaps at this moment, more than at any other time, each person on this planet is, confronted with the reality of his or her own mortality. Ironically, those who feel most secure are those who have contracted and recovered from the Coronavirus, and for the moment have gained, like Lazarus in today's Gospel reading, at least transitory respite. The thought of dying is usually something we have the luxury of postponing, or pushing into the back of our minds. It's not something we normally want to think or talk about: but, in our present troubled world, it is sheer escapism not to acknowledge its reality, for ourselves, and for those we hold most dear.

The reality and imminence of death intensify the beauty and reality of life. Ordinary things: each moment, sunshine, children's laughter, fresh leaves on a tree, a piece of music, a simple cup of tea, flowers opening in the garden, and most importantly friends, neighbours, family and loved ones, in the face of death, intensify in beauty, meaning and value. We become more deeply thankful for *those* things and *these* people, and for the very gift of life itself: and all that we have so often, so much and for so long taken for granted. Faced with the reality of our mortality, our faith, and the loving Presence of God become a much deeper and important reality as well. The ordinariness, the water of life, are transformed into the richness of wine.

Today is Passion Sunday. In this season of Passiontide, as its name implies, we, the Church, enter more fully into the sufferings of Our Lord. Passiontide culminates in Good Friday, the Crucifixion of Our Lord, and his agony, forsakenness and death on the Cross.

Unlike most of us though, death was not something that our Lord sought to escape and avoid. Rather, the momentum of His life towards Jerusalem, His words and actions at the Last Supper, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane reveal it was something, at such personal cost and pain, that He deliberately and purposefully *chose*. His total offering of Himself was a perfect response of His love for God, and His death, a perfect demonstration of His, God's, infinite love, for each one of us: for you, and for me.

Such overflowing love, such willingness to suffer and die, were revealed to Lady Julian of Norwich in her life of contemplation and prayer at a time when three quarters of her townsfolk had lost their lives in the Black Death, and she herself had narrowly escaped death.

*Our Blessed, Courteous Lord travailed into that full time
That he would suffer the sharpest throes
And the most grievous pains,
That ever were,
Or ever shall be
And died at the last.*

*And when he had so done and so borne us to bliss,
Yet might not all this be enough to his marvellous love?
Then showed He me
In these high overpassing words of love,
'If I might suffer more
I would suffer more'.*

In moments of life and death, we actually discover and experience such self-giving love, even in ourselves, however much we may have dimmed the image of God in us. How willingly would we, if only it were possible, take upon ourselves the life-threatening illness of a child or grandchild. And let us at this time give thanks and praise, and pray for Doctors, Nurses, and all those who risk *their* lives in the front line combating the Coronavirus, as well as all those who are providing essential services. Let us remember all those who have already given their lives in the service of others: and those who have had their lives taken from them.

In Our Lord's agony and death on the Cross we see revealed the ultimate underlying reality of existence, the infinite love of God: a love which has given us life itself, a love which through suffering and death has redeemed us, and a love which through our Lord's Resurrection is stronger than death, and bestows upon us the gift of eternal life within God's abiding Presence.

May we this Passiontide, in our silence, prayers and devotions, so enter into and share the sufferings of our Lord, of ourselves and others, that we come to know more fully the infinite depth of God's love for each one of us, and each and every member of his creation. May we, thereby, with Blessed Paul know in the depth of our being that there is nothing in life, nor in death, that can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord: nor ultimately separate us from one another. **Amen**

Lenten and Passiontide Devotions and Prayers

Stillness and Silent Prayer

Be still and know that I am God.

Very early in the morning,
while it was still dark,
Jesus got up,
left the house and went off to a solitary place,
where he prayed.

When you pray,
go into your inner room,
close your door
and pray to your Father who is in secret,
and your Father
who sees what is done in secret
will reward you.

Penitence

Crucified Christ,
in sorrow, sin,
come I to Thee.

In mercy, love,
come Thou to me.

Psalms 51,130.
Luke 15

The Jesus Prayer: repeated often

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of God,
have mercy upon me a sinner

Desire and Longing for God

As the deer yearns for cooling streams
so my soul is thirsting for you my God.

O God, Thou has made us for Thyself,
and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.

Until I am substantially oned to Him
I may never have full rest, nor true bliss.

God give me Thyself, for only in Thee do I have all.

And Our Lord showed these words and said,
'I am the ground of your seeking.
It is my will that you have it.
How should it then be
That you should not have your seeking?'

Sharing and Giving Thanks for the Sufferings of Christ

Psalm 22vv1-21.

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ

When they came to the place called the Skull,
there they crucified Him,
along with the criminals
one on his right,
the other on his left.
He said,
Father, forgive them,
for they do not know what they are doing.

From noon until three in the afternoon
darkness came over all the land.
About three in the afternoon
He cried out in a loud voice,
Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?
which means
My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?

Thanks be to Thee, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits Thou hast won for me.
For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.
Most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly,
and follow the more nearly, day by day

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee,
because by Thy holy Cross
Thou hast redeemed the world.

Good Lord Jesus,
All my thanks to Thee.
Good Lord Jesus,
Blessed may Thou be,
Because Thou sufferèd for me;

It is a joy, a bliss and endless delight to Thee
That ever didst Thou suffer thy Passion for me:
And could'st Thou, ever, suffer more,
Ever, would'st Thou suffer more.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

You were pierced for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon You,
and by your wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on You
the iniquity of us all.

Holy Communion

This is my Body which is given for you.
This is my Blood which is shed for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

O Sacred Banquet,
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the soul is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given

(St Thomas Aquinas)

Difficulty in Prayer

So He says this,
'Pray inwardly,
Even though you feel no joy in it.
For it does good,
Though you feel nothing,
See nothing,
Even though you think you cannot pray.
For when you are dry and empty,
Sick and weak,
Your prayers please me,
Though there be little enough to please you.
All believing prayer is precious in my sight.'

Lady Julian of Norwich.

Hymn *Lord, teach us how to pray aright.*

He loves us and enjoys us,
And so he wills that we love Him and enjoy him,
And firmly trust Him. And all shall be well.

Praying for others

Let us learn to pray the news

As we watch the news,
or in silent prayer reflect upon it
let us repeat often the following Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ
Son of God
Have mercy

Post Communion

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,
and gave up your life and died for us,
but are alive and reign, now and for ever.