

**Reflection for Good Friday 2021**  
**Isaiah 52; 13-53; 12 John 18; 1-19; 42**

**Collect for Good Friday**

*Lord, you are punctured, no longer divided between inside and out, knowing in your flesh the sharp violence that kills what it fears: take us through the narrow door from which an endless river flows into a new body – wounded but unafraid; through Jesus Christ, the passion of God. Amen.*

*(Prayer for an Inclusive Church)*

I know these are two long readings, but please to take your time and read them slowly, taking in what they say. And yes, we do know what these readings are telling us, we have heard it before, but that does not mean we cannot be challenged once again by this harsh and crude narrative.

On the Lent journey we have been following, various times we have referred to Jesus announcing his death, his being “lifted up”, and how the closest group of disciples rejected this. And yet here we are, once again facing the events of the terrible day, which will lead to Golgotha -the Skull- and the Cross. Crucifixion was the cruellest of all forms of punishment, a long and painful death sentence, reserved for the worst of criminals. A way to put others off any form of rebellion. Part of the punishment was the humiliation of having to carry your own cross. Rome excelled in this form of punishment.

In Isaiah, this Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant, presents us with what is to come. Written about 700 years before the time of Jesus, and yet this leads us to Jesus’ vision of his own ministry and mission, and it also influenced the way the writers of the New Testament developed their interpretation of that mission. This reading from Isaiah is a lens which lets us look at what happens to Jesus and his sufferings.

It is important to remember that Jesus was a practising Jew, and Isaiah’s teachings would have an immense impact on his life. He begins his public ministry according to Luke by reading a passage from Isaiah, and ends his life inspired by that same prophet. While grounded in the prophetic traditions of the Israelites and following this path, Jesus opened up a new way – the new Covenant, and in this way this reading that seems to end on a death note, is also the opening of the door of hope and life.

Today’s reading reminds us that on the way to the cross there will be betrayal, denial, humiliation, and finally the worst of all forms of punishment. Where he is even mocked by the sign placed above him on the cross, which is the notice of his death sentence, in latin it is the recognized **INRI: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**. Written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, so all in Jerusalem for the Passover would be able to read it. His final words: **it is finished**, and then to add to it all, his side is pierced. Follow the sequence of what goes on in parallel of the reading from Isaiah... do you pick up the references?

And this way we reach the Gospel reading, which is slightly different from the other three Gospels. Here we read of a greater role of the women (which will continue on Sunday). At the foot of the cross is Mary; when all the disciples (except for the one the Lord loved) have left Jesus alone. And here a new relationship is created “Woman, here is your son”, and to the disciple “Here is your mother”, a relationship based not on blood but on the recognition that in Christ we are all related.

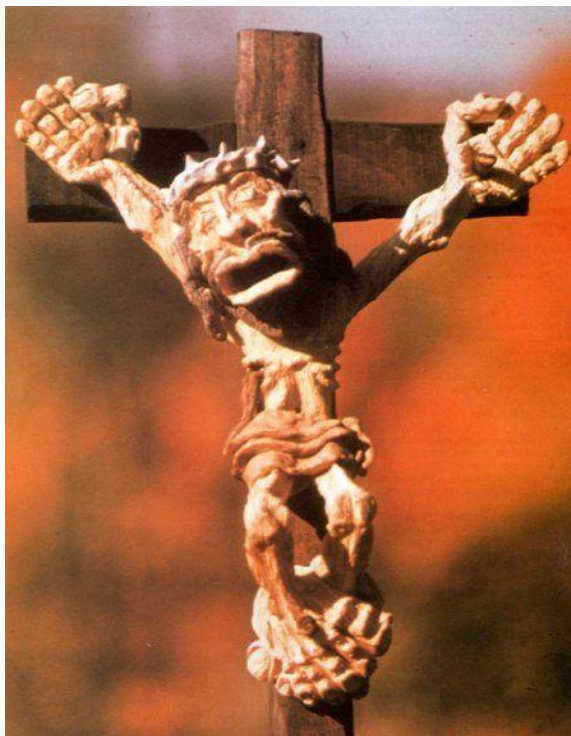
And then the burial. We encounter Joseph of Arimathea described as a secret disciple, probably because of his rank. But it is secret no longer, as he goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus for burial, and we encounter Nicodemus who had first appeared in John chapter 3, who now comes out into the open. And what if find so amazing of this narrative is that God gives each one the time to recognize where their loyalties lie. Time for Joseph, time for Nicodemus, a new time for Mary and the loved disciple, a time for Peter... a time for each one of us, to become the followers, in the open, on the new way forward. Behind all this is the presence of the Divine, and at the same time we encounter Jesus at his most human.

Jesus says, "I'm thirsty", and then says, "it's finished" and as we saw a few moments ago, his love for his mother. It is through moments like these, where we encounter the absolute vulnerability of the Suffering Servant that we recognize that God is leading us from the old creation to the new creation, and does this, as we referred to yesterday, not through earthly understanding of power, but through the new vision of power in Jesus – the power of love, of service, of caring.

It is important to see that this is Jesus at his most broken humanity, and if we only hold to the final words of "It is finished", all seems to be dead... full stop. And so, the Saturday is a day of waiting, in grief, in anger, in pain. Is there any hope left? Can we wait to find out, all I will say now is that we cannot take that hope for granted. Even if we do believe that the light came into the world, and the world cannot put it out, we also know that the world did not always believe in the light and did all it could to extinguish that light.

This could be the darkest moment of life. And in one way it is. If light is to cut through this darkness we should cling to hope, and this is not always easy...

... for today we end here, hoping we can hope, hoping against all hope that this is the time given to us by God so we can find our place on the way of faithfulness. Amen



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