

PREPARING FOR THE GREAT WEEK

Good Friday

Remember that in all our liturgies we are seeking to remember in the biblical sense of that word. When the Jews 'remember' the Passover, it is not simply a calling to mind a past event. In a sense they live it and its blessings now. It's not a matter of the event being repeated, for it has done its effective work, but rather that we are spiritual present. I used to have a painting of Moses leading the people of Israel through a 'wilderness' of the Australian bush.

On Good Friday we seek to be close to the Saviour in his death. That the day of his death can be described throughout the world as 'Good' is at the heart of the mystery we enter in to. The supreme goodness of the Lord is expressed in his willingness to die as an act of self-giving love; to embrace himself the implications of what sin is—separation from God - because he does not want us to be separated, but rather to 'abide' in God for ever. That abiding comes at a cost for sin has its implications as we all know from our own experience.

It is not appropriate for us to spare ourselves from the reality of Good Friday by some sort of entertaining liturgy.

The church is stark and bare. The clergy and servers prostrate themselves in silence at the beginning of the service.

There are readings and there are prayers.

The cross, or rather a replica of the cross is carried through the church with the words sung three times. 'Behold the wood of the Cross, on which was hung the Saviour of the World' We are invited to look *deeply* and see not only the tragedy of a human life snuffed out, but the incarnate God crushed by the ones he loves and brought into being.

The congregation are invited, if they wish to, to come forward and venerate the cross, often with a kiss or gentle touch. Again we look beyond the carved wood to the Saviour, much as we might kiss a photo of a loved one...

The sacrament consecrated at the 'Last Supper' the previous evening and which has been in the garden we have made is offered to the congregation. On this occasion we receive in 'one kind', simply the bread.

Then we leave in silence.

The liturgy is not especially pleasant, but it is moving.

Forty days with St John

Readings and reflections

by Bishop Michael Ramsey

Week 4



No Cross no Glory

Know the Cross Know the Glory

LENT 4 Monday

THE THINGS TO COME

Pray this Lenten prayer before you begin each study:

Keep me in peace, O Christ my God, under the protection of your holy and venerable cross; save me from my enemies, visible and invisible, and count me worthy to glory you with thanksgiving, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen

Ask the Lord to bless all those in our parish who are also undertaking these studies with a gift of wisdom and understanding.

Read John 14 : 12 - 20

The departure of Jesus to death will enable the coming of a new relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The rest of the discourse at the supper is about this relationship. It is described not in ordered sequence but in images and sayings which come tumbling over one another in a picture which is always moving.

Greater works than those of Jesus will be done when Jesus departs to the Father. No doubt these works include the conversion of many lives. Prayer in the name of Jesus is sure to be answered, and to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray as people who are possessed by him. The Holy Spirit, coming to be their Advocate and their Comforter, will enable these things to happen. Jesus will not show himself to all the world, but those who love him and keep his words will have Jesus and the Father coming and making their dwelling with them.

All this will be made possible because Jesus is going to his death. The disciples will lose the present relation to Jesus of sight and touch in order to enter upon the unseen relation to him in the future. Let them be glad in what is happening. Meanwhile the conflict is imminent, the prince of evil is approaching. It is time to go, and Jesus says, 'Let us go on'.

LENT 4 Saturday

THE PRAYER FOR GLORY

Read John 17 : 1 - 5

The prayer of Jesus is in three parts : for himself, for his present disciples, for those who will be disciples through their mission.

Jesus prays that on the coming day which is Good Friday, the Father will give glory to him and he will give glory to the Father. The glory is the splendour of self giving love, and this glory is God's in all eternity in the self giving love of Father and son in the power of the Spirit. Now it is going to be revealed in the midst of suffering and death, a suffering and death so real that Jesus has shrunk from it and will shrink from it again; but the Father's will and glory are paramount and in that will and glory he shares.

It has been the work of Jesus in his mission to give the life eternal to those who believe and this life eternal is the life lived here and now in the knowledge of God and of Jesus. In this way the disciples of Jesus are having a glimpse of the things which are eternal, and when Jesus passes on to suffering and death he has eternity in his heart.

LENT 4 Friday

THE COMFORTER

Read John 13 : 21 - 38

There is nothing cosy about the title Comforter.

The comfort of the Holy Spirit is in line with the teaching of the prophets about God coming to comfort his people Israel. The divine comfort which comes in the day of the Lord includes bringing peace and prosperity, but also the burning up of injustice and violence and wrong of every kind and the reconciliation of all the people to God's righteous will. The aged Simeon in the temple was waiting for the comfort of Israel (Luke 2 : 25)

So the comfort which the Holy Spirit brings to the disciples is the strength and peace which go with their acceptance of God's will and God's glory. Theirs will be the peace which is not of this world (14 : 27) and the peace which will be found even in the midst of tribulation (16 : 33). The theme of the Spirit as Comforter is drawn out in the closing words of the discourse where in the midst of bewilderment and tribulation there will be the inner peace which Jesus brings.

We pray: Almighty God, without whose aid we can do nothing, endow us with your spirit of power from on high that out of weakness we may be made strong, through Jesus Christ our lord.

LENT 4 Tuesday

THE VINE and the BRANCHES

Read John 15 : 1 - 11

So close are the disciples to Jesus, they are a part of his life which flows into theirs. The language of the Holy Communion says this and means this. We have in this passage a wonderful field for self-examination. Our own fruitfulness? See the description of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 : 22 - 23. Our own touch with Jesus by prayer and sacrament? Our recollection that we are near to Jesus not only in the sacrament but in the world where he suffers in those who suffer? Our readiness to be pruned by confessing our sins and seeking the Father's absolution? Our motive that the Father be glorified? It is time for us to search our consciences.

But (verse 9) we set about realizing ourselves as branches of the vine not by our own initiative but by our awareness of the love of the Father for Jesus and the love of Jesus for us. Put yourself in the stream of that love, and it will stir the response of your heart and will.

After the imagery of the vine and the branches Jesus passes on to another imagery of his relation to the disciples, the imagery of friendship; we are branches, and we are friends. What does this latter image convey? Each image has its own special meaning.

LENT 4 Wednesday

THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is the sending of the Holy Spirit which will enable the promises of Jesus in the discourse to be fulfilled. Read together the passages about the Holy Spirit which come at different points in the discourse at the Supper : John 14 : 15 - 17; 14 : 25 - 26; 15 : 26 - 27; 16 : 7 - 14. From these passages we learn that the Holy spirit will teach the truth to the disciples, remind them of the words of Jesus to them, witness to Jesus and enable the disciples to witness to him, convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgement, and glorify Jesus by bringing the needs of Jesus to the disciples. We saw reading chapter 7 that the gift of the Spirit had to wait for the glorifying of Jesus in his death. It will be the mission of the Holy Spirit to bring into the lives of the disciples that glory which is seen in the passion of Jesus. So the saying in 16 : 3 that the Spirit will glorify Jesus sums up the mission of the Spirit to the disciples.

The Spirit is called the other Paraclete. That word has two possible meanings and both meanings are implied by the context. The one meaning is advocate, the language of the law court, and the other meaning is comforter, the bringer of divine strength to the disciples. Meanwhile, think of the promise, 'He shall glorify me'. All human beings are prone to the false glory of pride and selfishness. The Spirit brings into human lives the true glory of Jesus, the glory of self-giving love. As Jesus glorified the Father in his mission in the world, so in turn the Spirit will glorify Jesus in us, albeit by a conflict with the false glory which lingers in us.

LENT 4 Thursday

THE ADVOCATE

After Jesus has passed out of sight the disciples will face a hostile world. It will be for them to plead the cause of their master. But they will not be unaided. Using the imagery of the law court, Jesus says that they will have the help of the Spirit as one who will powerfully put their case for them. Jesus will bear witness himself, and he will enable the disciples to bear witness, recalling to them the witness of his own teaching. While the imagery is that of argument in a court, no doubt the witness is by lives as well as by argument. The church bears witness by preaching, teaching, and apologetic, even more by saintly lives which reflect Jesus himself.

More still the Spirit will, as the advocate, not only bear witness but will also bring about conviction. Read John 16 : 8 - 11. The world has utterly wrong ideas about sin and righteousness and judgement. The Spirit will convict the world and its errors and bring about recognition of what is true. The truth is that the failure of the contemporaries of Jesus to believe in him had its roots in moral blindness; the departure of Jesus to his death was righteousness indeed, and the cross is the divine judgement of the world. In each case the truth is utterly contrary to what the world believed, and only the spirit could bring about reversal of conviction.

Pray that the Church's witness may put far greater store upon the work of the spirit in convicting the world.