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Subject: Good Friday and Holy Week reflections
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Good Friday greetings everyone (Happy Good Friday doesn't sound quite right, but you know what I mean!)

I'm attaching here both a reflection for today, but also the reflections that I posted on the parishes facebook page on the evenings of Holy Week. I will write again on Easter Day with an Easter message. Thank you to those who have given feedback suggesting this way of sharing reflections has been helpful in the circumstances we find ourselves in. As ever, let us all continue in prayer for one another, and keeping in touch in whatever way we can, and don't hesitate to give me a call if there is anything I can help with, or anything I should know.

Every blessing

John

Reading and Reflection for Good Friday

Reading: Mark 15.33-39

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, eloi, lema sabachthani?' which mean, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly, this man was God's Son!'

Reflection

Children often ask the best questions. As adults, we are not necessarily always grateful for that. The questions can be hard, even impossible to answer, as they come at familiar things from an unexpected angle. But children's questions are often not just challenging, but astute.

And a question that is often asked by children (and, let's face it, not just children) is "Why is today called Good Friday, when Jesus died? Surely it should be Bad Friday."

Before we rush to try to answer the question, it is important to stay with the force of the challenge. Maybe today should be called Bad Friday. We recall the judicial murder of an innocent man; the rigged trial, the torture, the humiliation, and the final moments of an agonising death. And, recognising those other innocent victims of murder and abuse across the

centuries, we should be wary in the extreme of justifying those crimes because of some superior purpose that they may have served. This day is a day of lament and of mourning, for Jesus and for all those who, literally or metaphorically, are being crucified.

And if it were not for what will happen on Easter Day, that would have to be our final answer. We could not speak of “Good” Friday. But Easter changes everything, and in the light of their experience of the risen Christ, the first Christians were drawn to look again at the cross of Christ and to see it differently. They recalled the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, taking the wine and declaring it to be a sign of his blood, poured out as a ransom for many. They were encouraged to see a redemptive purpose in that cruel death of their friend. In some way, the death of Jesus on the cross had brought about the salvation of the world.

So, Good Friday? Yes. But seeing the crucifixion as an act of redemption does not take away the earlier truth, that this was a hideous miscarriage of justice, and a time of suffering and grief. Somehow we need to stay with all aspects of this day, the good, the bad, and the distinctly ugly.

And that holding together of the bad and the good, of suffering and of redemption, of darkness and of shafts of light that pierce the gloom, is vital for us at this time. The coronavirus pandemic is almost certainly the most devastating event to have happened to our country in my lifetime and maybe yours. The suffering of those who have been taken most seriously ill cannot be underestimated. The pain of those who have lost loved ones, and have not even been able to be at their bedside in their final hours, is unimaginable. Jesus’ cry of abandonment on the cross is echoed in the laments of those who have travelled that journey.

And we do not forget or minimise that suffering when we also discern signs of hope and of redemption. There have been good things that have emerged over these last weeks; in many ways social distancing has been matched by a growing sense of community and togetherness. In places, there are signs of creation being healed through the reduction in human activity. As a society, and as churches, there have been lessons learned that we can treasure and hold on to when the current crisis has passed. There are good things to celebrate. But none of that should make us think of the pandemic itself as a “good thing”, as somehow sent by God for either our judgement or our salvation.

Good can come out of even the worst of situations. That could easily be a glib and optimistic truism. But today tells us that it is not. The cross of Christ reminds us starkly of the reality of suffering and of death; but Easter assures us that death does not have the final word. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “Goodness is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Life is stronger than death. Light is stronger than darkness. Victory is ours, through Him who loves us.”

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