



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Palm Sunday. April 5th 2020

A Prayer for this Holy Week

Jesus, our brother,
you followed the necessary path
and were broken on our behalf.
May we neither cling to our pain where it is futile,
nor refuse to embrace the cost when it is required of us:
that in losing our selves for you sake,
we may be brought to new life,

Christ our victim,
whose beauty was disfigured and whose body was torn upon the cross;
open wide your arms to embrace a suffering world,
that we may not turn away our hearts,
but abandon ourselves to your mercy
through Jesus Christ,
the passion of God.
Amen.

Gospel Reading – The Crucifixion of Jesus – Matthew 27 v27-66

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot

save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, "After three days I will rise again." Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, "He has been raised from the dead", and the last deception would be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.' So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' cries Jesus in the earliest accounts of his Passion as recorded in both Mark and Matthew.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Words of challenge? Words of despair? Words of anger? Scandalous words? Words that could be so undermining of faith that Luke and John record different final words of Jesus from the cross, "*Into your hands I commend my Spirit*" and "*It is finished (or It is accomplished)*", words that can much more easily be seen as trusting or even triumphal.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' cries Jesus out loud in his own tongue, for all to hear that first Good Friday, to be remembered and recalled for generations, to echo round our world and in our consciousness, and probably to be on our lips today. For in our present situation it seems a reasonable, natural, and appropriate cry, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*

We are caught up in events that seem to belong to disaster movies, or we expect to be in far away countries, and we can expect to be bewildered, stressed, confused, but also in various measures coping, getting on with it, living day by day and making the most of it. Yes, this crisis has brought out the dark side of human nature in selfish hoarding, assault by deliberately coughing at others, ignoring advice or social distance, or being wise and smug after the event and criticising others for not anticipating or preparing.

But also, the good in humanity by selfless sacrifice, volunteering, assisting neighbours and those who are vulnerable and in need, and building up ways of staying in touch. And Yes, turning to God, and maybe saying in our hearts and even out loud, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* Some people are already communicating that this plague is God's punishment on creation, or that it is a powerful God's response to people who have forsaken him.

Whether they see that forsaking of God in not caring for creation and abusing its resources, or in the inequalities of human society caused by economic and political systems linked to evils of racism and nationalism, or in personal morality and lifestyle decisions, or even in worshipping other gods. People are saying things like this, but I believe they are profoundly wrong and are misrepresenting and perverting the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament God makes promises (covenants) with Noah, Abraham and Moses. With Noah the rainbow after the Flood is the everlasting sign of God's promise that he will never destroy as punishment. With Abraham, God promises that he will be the father of many nations, that there will always be new generations with rich varieties of cultures, cooking, and creeds. With Moses God promises to all those who are oppressed, I will lead you out.....I will deliver you.....I will redeem you.....I will take you as my people.....

Jesus at his last supper remembers these covenants, but adds to the narrative, adds to the tradition, adds a New Covenant, not to replace these biblical covenants, but to fulfil, advance, and show them really present here and now.

"This (unleavened bread) is my body, which is broken and given for you. Drink (from this cup) all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Jesus's body will be broken on the cross, and given for us, and he will say, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* Jesus's blood will be shed, pronouncing and announcing the everlasting love of a vulnerable God for his vulnerable people, and he will say, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* We in our situation will feel, and say, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*

This plague will lead some people to turn away from God, to forsake him. This plague will lead some people to turn to God, for God will not forsake them. This plague will lead some people to transform their understanding or picture of God to one who embraces that sense and reality of forsakenness, and if we are patient enough to wait, will show us the reality of resurrection, new life, and intimacy with God.

In these times, surrounded by plague, the old covenants with their promises not to destroy, to give a future, to redeem, are renewed and the new covenant seen as much in broken bodies and spilt blood, as in the pervasion of human love, is given for you, all of you, and for many, is announced and pronounced and made real. And we can still cry out, as God himself in Jesus cried out, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* but that God will still offer the reality of resurrection, new life, and intimacy with God. And that we will have to wait, be patient, to discover how that reality will be revealed and lived out for each and everyone of us.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

God bless, Andrew

Prayers for this Holy Week

Let us pray to the Father, who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to give us life. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross for your Son. Give us grace to lift heavy loads from those who we are in contact with and to stand with those who may die.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

Your Son watched the soldiers gamble and share his clothes. Transform the hearts of those who make a profit from their victims and those who are hardened by their work.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

The thief, who was crucified with Jesus, was promised a place in your kingdom. Give pardon and hope, healing and peace to all who look death in the face.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

From the cross, Jesus entrusted Mary and his beloved disciple John to each other's care. Help us also to care for one another and fill our homes with your love.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

The centurion was astonished to recognize your glory in the crucified Messiah. Open the minds of those who do not know you to grasp in your Son the meaning of life and death.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

Joseph of Arimathea came to take your Son's body away. Give hope and faith to the dying and bereaved, gentleness to those who minister to them, and courage to those whose faith is secret.

Loving God, we look to you; receive our prayer.

Simon and Joseph, Mary and John, became part of your Church in Jerusalem. Bring into your Church today a varied company of people to walk with Christ in the way of his passion, and to find their salvation in the victory of his cross.

Lord of the Church, hear our prayer, and make us one in heart and mind to serve you with joy for ever.

Amen.

May the cross be the sign in which we begin again to undo the cords of violence, the misery of exclusion, the voice of despair, and proclaim the love without conditions, and the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, evermore.

Amen.