

Passion Sunday 2026 – Dry Bones

Homily from Revd Andy Todd, Diocesan Secretary for the Worcester Diocese

“Mortal, can these bones live?”

When people ask me, “What does a Diocesan Secretary do?”, my stock response is, “I’ll tell you when I find out!” I keep discovering new things for which I am apparently responsible. Probably the most important part of my role though is to lead the team of people in the Diocesan Office which supports our wonderful clergy and parishes with things as diverse as safeguarding, clergy housing, training, caring for our church buildings, finance, and working with schools. When we talk about what we do, we tend to describe ourselves as a “Parish Support Hub”. We’re there to serve.

My role means I get to see a lot of what happens in our church communities around the Diocese, so I’m very conscious of the challenges all our people – including you – are facing, and of how much you manage to do despite those challenges. I hope you know how much it is valued, but it won’t do any harm for me to say it again: thank you so much for your faithful service, and for all you do to grow Christ’s kingdom in the communities *you* serve.

You may be aware that last year, we held consultations with representatives of every single church in the Diocese. Above all we wanted to listen to churches’ stories. We heard about hopes and frustrations, opportunities and challenges.

Not a few of those conversations put me in mind of Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones. Many people are feeling dried-out, worn down - if not completely skeletal, at least mildly arthritic. Perhaps you recognise something of that feeling in your own life?

In Ezekiel’s vision, the people had been crying to God, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone.” They feel they have no life because they have no hope.

Looking around at the world today, tuning into the News or reading the papers, it can feel difficult, can’t it, to find reasons to hope? Conflicts in Iran, Gaza and Ukraine: the repercussions affect us all. Fears about the impact of Environmental issues on our world and the world we will leave to generations after us. The worrying possibilities of powerful technologies like AI which we don’t fully understand and cannot properly control. Health and Social Security systems straining at the seams. And as I heard one group of young adults observe last week, a world in which confrontational and aggressive dialogue seems to have become completely normalised.

But in all this, you and I are still called to be people of hope.

Not simply **optimistic** people. Optimism is about looking on the bright side, believing that things will somehow turn out for the best. Don't get me wrong: optimism is a wonderful thing. But we are called to be people of **hope**. People who can look squarely at the awful brokenness of the world, and still have hope. A hope founded on trust in who God has revealed Himself to be in Jesus.

Jesus urged his followers to believe, as he himself did, in the utter, unlimited GOODNESS and KINDNESS of God. Whether times are good or bad, whether our days are lived in the sun or in the shadowy valley of death, Jesus says: God's love for you is unchanging, undiminished, total.

In a world which seems so broken, and where we ourselves too often feel like dry bones, how can we make sense of this?

The author Penelope Wilcock imagines Jesus saying these words to us: "The Father's love is big enough to embrace the worst that can befall us; holding it until it develops into blessing. His love is like a matrix that transfigures everything put through it. Death and pain, loss and sorrow, injustice and bewilderment and longing – when these are held in the Father's love and surrender to its power, everything yields blessing.... However far gone a situation, nothing is beyond redemption. Even the challenges of global proportions. There is no shelf-life to His transformative power, no place His touch cannot reach to save."

I'm wary of talking about the "core" of the Christian message, as if it could be reduced to just one thing, because it seems to me that as I have gone through life, different elements have taken on a greater significance at different times.

But I would say I believe we get very close to its heart when we understand that in Jesus we see that God brings light from darkness, hope from despair, life even from death.

It seems to be a pattern of the Christian life that, awful though suffering is, and although we should never seek it out, God so often meets with us in new and deeper ways in our times of greatest darkness. I've seen this in the people I've been privileged to accompany on their journeys, and I've seen it in my own experience.

As we prepare to enter this holy season in the Church's year, journeying with Jesus through his sufferings and death, may I encourage you to offer to God your own sufferings and wherever you are encountering darkness? Maybe it's an experience of personal illness, or of disappointment, or failure. Maybe it's the suffering of a loved one. Maybe it's the brokenness of the world.

Our faith does not remove the pain of these things: if anything, it makes the pain more acute. Picture Jesus weeping like a child at the tomb of his dead friend Lazarus.

But offer that brokenness to the God who loves and accepts you totally, who brings light from darkness, wholeness from brokenness, life even from death.

Perhaps use some of those beautiful words from this morning's Psalm:

I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

And let that hope, little by little, bring life back to your dry bones.

The Church's hope – my hope and yours – is that we can bring to God even what looks like death and disaster, and know that the transformative power of his love can bring good from bad, life from death. It is the same transformative power which brought Lazarus back from the dead (temporarily), which brought Christ back from the dead (permanently), and will one day restore all things (eternally).

"Mortal, can these bones live?"

You bet they can!