

Good Friday

25<sup>th</sup> March 2016

‘Conception and Crucifixion’

Is 52–53: *He was pierced through for our faults*

Ps 30: *My life is in Your hands, deliver me from the hands of those who hate me.*

Heb 4; 5: *During His life on earth He offered up prayer and entreaty ...*

Jn 18–19: the Passion according to John.

About 3 times a century — although only twice this century, and not again now till 2157 — there is the coincidence of Good Friday falling on the feast of the Annunciation, 25<sup>th</sup> March. And many poets and priests down the ages have made a big thing of this, seeing the beauty of Jesus’s earthly beginning and end falling on that same day. The famous English poet, John Donne, wrote a moving poem back in 1608, which was one of those few years, like today, when Conception and Crucifixion coincide. His poem reflects poignantly on Our Lady, at fifteen receiving Him into her womb and at nearly fifty having to give Him up:

**At once a Son is promised her, and gone;**

**Gabriel gives Christ to her, He her to John;**

But this is indeed what she said ‘yes’ to all those years ago when she agreed to the Angel Gabriel’s message asking her from God to be the Mother of His eternal Son. When she

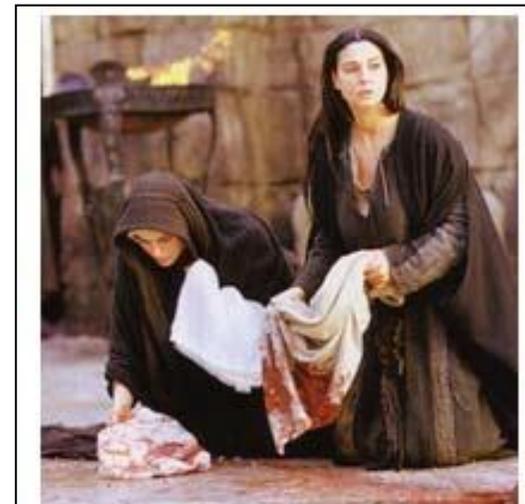
said ‘yes’ to that, she also said ‘yes’ to having her own soul pierced through with acute sorrow.

One of the loveliest ways in which the Church accompanies Jesus on His ‘Way of the Cross’ is to do so with Our Lady. In this way we cannot help being caught up into the perfect emotion of following Jesus as He suffers and dies. Think of the Stations of the Cross, particularly nos. 4 and 13: ‘Jesus meeting His Blessed Mother’ and ‘Jesus being taken down from the Cross and placed in the arms of His Mother.’ And we traditionally sing, between each station, that beautiful 13<sup>th</sup>-c. hymn, *Stabat Mater ... At the Cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother, weeping, close to Jesus to the last.* By walking that same road with Our Lady; by following with her very closely along the road of Jesus to Calvary, we cannot help but be moved in our soul to have sorrow for our sins and to adore Jesus for His loving us to the very end. Mary, utterly sinless, suffers more than the rest of us, not only because she is His Blessed Mother, but also because she sees the full horror of sin; we are deadened

and hard of heart, and we can sometimes remain unmoved even by cruelty and injustice, and our sins ... But when we travel that road with Our Lady, her pure humanity, her selfless, sinless, love for Jesus shows us what we each should be feeling. Her immense joy in 4BC on that day of Annunciation, conceiving the eternal Son of God in her womb) is turned in 33AD to the most intense sorrow. As we keep this Good Friday, we can be in no better company than that of His holy Mother: she will teach us how to weep for Jesus's pains; and to weep for our sins.

The other week, when I was on my retreat, I set myself the task each day of reading chapters from *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, by Blessed Anna Catherine Emmerich, a German nun, visionary and mystic. In the Lent of 1823, a year before she died, she had a series of most powerful, and realistic visions in which she experienced, almost at first hand, insights into the scale of Jesus's suffering on the Way to the Cross. It was her visions that provided much of the detail when the Mel Gibson film was made the other year, 'The Passion of

the Christ' — a film criticized for its portrayal of the violence meted out on Our Lord, but which I always felt, even so, was probably only half as bad as the real thing! One thing I noticed, as I savoured Anna Catherine Emmerich's words, was the constant presence of Mary: there she was, sharing in the Passion as only a mother could; and as only the immaculate Mother of the Saviour could. For me, one of the most moving moments is when she takes the cloths provided by the wife of Pontius Pilate



Directly from Emmerich's Dolorous Passion

and wipes up the great quantities of the Precious Blood split during the savage, extended scourging at the pillar. She falls to her knees to soak up Jesus's sacred blood, saving it, and revering

it; for she it was who gave Jesus His flesh and blood in her motherly womb. She kneels, just as we do in Mass, to

honour the blood poured out for us in His Passion. As we prepare to creep to the Cross, to bow, genuflect, kiss the wood of the Jesus's saving death, let us come up as if with Mary, inching up the aisle as if on those narrow Jerusalem streets with her. Let her motherly love for Jesus teach us to love Him as she does, without reserve.