

Good Friday

14th April 2017

'The Sound of Silence'

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.

There's an elderly abbot that I know — in a monastery where I like to go on retreat sometimes — and he's not a great fan of the homily. Of course, he knows it has its place; but he also says that sometimes there's not really a homily needed ... The Scripture speaks for itself, and sometimes the homily can detract from Scriptures own powerful message. Well, I can certainly feel a bit like that on Good Friday when we have proclaimed together the text of the Passion according to St John. What can one say after that? What is there to say? How can my words add to the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God? He has died for love of me; He has died to take my sins away. Part of me just wants to fall into a silent reverie as I contemplate that Jesus would actually do this for me, for us, ... for all humanity.

It is right that silence, therefore, does form a part of our stark Good Friday liturgy: the solemn silent entrance; the silent kneeling in prayer at the start; the falling to our

knees in silence at the death of Jesus in the Passion reading; the kneeling for silent prayer in the General Intercessions in a few minutes' time; the brief silences in between the hymns as we creep to the Cross to venerate it; the silent exit today, as we leave at the end of the Liturgy in contemplation of what we have witnessed to this Good Friday. And silence is good; silence is good for us, especially when there's nothing that needs saying, or could add nothing. Silence doesn't necessarily indicate disconnection ("giving someone the silent treatment.") Silence can also indicate the sort of deep love that doesn't always require voiced words. Think of the silence of a loving, long-married couple: they don't always need to talk, they can be comfortable in each other's presence without words. Our silence in the face of the Cross is a bit the same: we gaze reverently on this One, Jesus, who loves us so deeply. His often-silent actions — for example, His refusal to answer may of accusers' taunts — are not a sign of disconnection from humanity, but indeed a sign of His quiet commitment to His loving, suffering, mission.

There's a line that ends one of the readings that families quite often choose for the funeral of a loved one — I think it's in the Book of Lamentations — and which I always find very powerful: "It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save." God is not a loud God, a 'shouty' bullying God; He is the God of gentleness and sometimes of silence. He is powerful in His silence; just as Jesus the Son was powerful in His silent acceptance of the Cross, His agonizing walk to Calvary, His painful Crucifixion and ours of hanging there till death. As Isaiah had prophesied so many centuries before: "Harshly dealt with, He bore it humbly, He never opened His mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughterhouse, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, never opening its mouth." Our Lord's silence is not weakness, but the strength of God Himself who knows that no physical torment, no violent hatred, can crush the love He has, even for sinful mankind. He does not have to prove Himself; He just 'is' ... He just *is* the remedy for this world's ills, and only those who contemplate this truth deeply and quietly in their hearts will come to understand this, and follow Him.

So: our moving, simple, and powerful ceremony today for Good Friday should prompt us to silence ... to a loving reflection: do I take the time for silence, for prayer, for loving communion with God? How desperately we need silence in our lives, when everywhere there is the noise and bustle of everyday life denying us silence (like piped music in shops, in restaurants, and even in toilets!). We need to avoid the distractions of constant noise, and make sure that our life has its times of truly quiet prayer. We dearly need the silence of prayer with the God who loves us, simply allowing Him in quiet to reach out to our hearts, comfort and console them, speak to our souls and give us that guidance to live as He would truly want.

Good Friday — the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross — is the centre-point of all history. "It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save." It is so good for us to be here, sometimes in silence, knowing that the Lord came as He had promised, that He suffered silently when we rejected Him, but that even so He offered humanity the only salvation it can ever know. "It is good to wait in silence for the Lord to save."