

Good Friday

19th April 2019

'The Cross shines forth in mystic glow'

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.



Photo by CHRISTOPHE PETIT TESSON/POOL/EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock (10205506cs)
A view of the cross and the sculpture 'Pietà' by Nicholas Coustou behind debris inside the Notre-Dame de Paris in the aftermath of a fire that devastated the cathedral, in Paris, France, 16 April 2019. The fire started in the late afternoon on 15 April in one of the most visited monuments of the French capital.

There is a beautiful ancient hymn in the Church, written by a saintly French bishop of Poitiers in about 550AD, to accompany processions of the True Cross, and therefore also a fitting hymn for Good Friday. In its original Latin it's entitled *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*, and in a common translation, "The Royal banners forward go," referring to the instruments of Jesus's Passion as being His kingly

insignia. The second line goes, *Fulget Crucis mysterium* — "The Cross shines forth in mystic glow." We sang it on Tuesday at Westminster Cathedral, at the Chrism Mass, packed with priests and people of our diocese, as the final long procession of clergy began to make its way out of our beautiful cathedral church. We were also very conscious to be giving thanks, in our hearts, that unlike our brothers and sisters in the diocese of Paris, we have an intact, beautiful Mother church, with a roof on, and not a nave full of charred timbers, open to the sky.

"The Cross shines forth in mystic glow" — this line came back to me, powerfully, as soon as I saw the first images of the damaged interior of Notre Dame on the day after the fire. Because, glowing mystically above the blackened timbers littering the sanctuary, was the great gold sanctuary cross, standing intact, above the also-saved statue of the Pietà — the holy Mother embracing the dead body of Our Crucified Saviour. Shining down upon this scene of chaos and devastation, was the Cross, then: still shining brightly despite the dark and horror of what had befallen the

Cathedral, and the Catholic people — especially of Paris diocese, but also far beyond, the world over. It is the radiant glory of the Cross of Jesus that we celebrate today, and in St John's Gospel particularly the Cross is depicted as our Lord's triumph. It is the altar on which He lays down His life, but it is at the same time His throne from which He surveys the people of the world darkened by sin, and from where He dispenses mercy on His poor afflicted children.

The scene of Calvary on that first Good Friday could be described in similar terms of devastation and blackness as those images of charred Notre Dame: Golgotha, with the crucified and suffocating Jesus, looks as if the world has caved in, and to many eyes, even those of His followers, it must have seemed like that. But in fact the Cross shines forth, accomplishing God's plan from eternity. Our Lord's final words express this: "It is accomplished ... It is consummated ... It is finished." Jesus has conquered, and in His humanity has entered the domain of death to overthrow it with His radiant and indestructible divinity. Already, in God's sight, and to the eyes of faith, even the

Cross of Roman execution is shining brightly as a banner of victory. Already, even before the Resurrection itself, this instrument of death and torture has become a glowing sign of God's love overcoming human sin.

And this is how we should see life: the life of humanity, of all of history, of the life of the world today, ... and of my own life too. Even if it seems to be a scene of devastation sometimes, even if it seems black and a bit lifeless, even if things aren't going well — in my job, in my family, in my marriage, with my children, in my nation's or global politics, in the upsurge of violent crime, in failings in members of the Church ... Yet, "the Cross shine forth in mystic glow." Above it all, and shedding light on it all, is the Cross of Jesus. It sheds mystic light on His dead body embraced by His Mother Mary, and by our Catholic Mother Church, the body that will rise to life and bring new light and new life to the ruins of humanity.

So, today, this brightly shining, warm Good Friday, allow the glow of the Cross to shine on you, and on your situation in life. As the Cross is lifted high in procession, as

the wood is gradually revealed, and as the sacrificed body of Our Saviour is unveiled, see its glow, see its mystic light, see this uplifting sign of the Victor's conquest on our behalf. Gaze on the Cross with deep love, this afternoon. And as you creep forward to venerate the holy Cross, do so with utmost reverence and grateful hearts, to kiss with love the rough wood of shame which Jesus has fashioned into a banner of His infinite mercy. Allow yourselves to embrace the Cross, accepting the harder things in life for the sake of the Victory that Jesus draws you in to. Don't turn away from the Cross, or you will lose sight of the very light that enlightens and makes sense of this world's darkness and the shadow of death.

A later verse of that hymn, *Vexilla Regis*, begins: *O Crux, ave, spes unica!* — “Hail, O Cross, our only hope.” To this one and only hope the disciples of Jesus have clung, through thick and thin, through calamities and sins, through collapses of empires and internal strife, for all these 20 centuries, and will continue to do so. Jesus calls out from the Cross to place our one and only hope in Him — in Him

crucified — for only through His Cross can we have access to His Resurrection. So, see that hope, that heavenly light, that mystic glow, shine down on you from the Cross on this truly-good Friday, that He may light up your life, lift your hearts, raise from the ashes of things that have not gone well, and reassure you, in your spirits, that in Him, only in Him, and bathed in His light, all will be well.