Palm Sunday 2025

We have listened to St Luke’s account of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, not only to mark the beginning of Holy Week, but also that our hearts may be moved by the depth of the Lord’s love. It is possible, that as we look at the various personalities named in the narrative, we may recognise aspects of ourselves.

Confronted by a crisis, or when weariness, or the monotony of life, drains away our good intentions and enthusiasm, our resolve to be true followers of the Lord can fail us. That is what happened to Peter. From personal experience, we understand his failure only too well!

Jesus looked at Judas, and asked, *“you betray me with a kiss?”* Judas’ friendship was a “false-friendship” – he prized money more than friendship. What do we prize more than our friendship with Jesus?

There are always those who seek to do our thinking for us! Today we call them “influencers!” “*The crowd”*, full of expectation, first greeted Jesus with cries of *“Hosanna”,* then, influenced by their leaders, they become a mob, and howl *“Crucify him!”* How easily our opinions can be swayed, and our values undermined, by those powerful persistent voices of today’s secular influencers?

Both Herod and Pilate despised the chief priests and their associates; both knew that they were being used to get rid of Jesus. Initially, Herod was delighted to see Jesus, *“hoping to see some miracles worked by him”,* but when Jesus refused to respond, Herod treated him with contempt. Pilate, the apparently all-powerful Roman governor, was a fake; he was ruled by fear - fear of his subjects and fear of the emperor! He capitulated to those who shouted the loudest – he had no integrity. Neither Herod or Pilate cared for justice, and both compromised with evil.

The guards were cruel and coarse; they relied on brute force! Meekness brought out the worse in them, simply because they were bullies. But such behaviour is not restricted to guardrooms and the barracks. It happens in offices and workplaces, and in school playgrounds – it happens when someone decides to make himself or herself feel good by making another feel bad!

In the great drama of the passion there are four characters who play small but significant parts, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, and the two thieves. Barabbas was guilty of the crime of which Jesus, though innocent, was charged. Both he, and the unrepentant thief, were sinners, but Jesus died for them, died bearing the sins of the many – bearing our sins too. In Simon of Cyrene we meet the first to respond to Jesus’ invitation, *“take up your cross and follow me”.* The repentant thief recognised his guilt and prayed, *“Jesus, remember me”*, and the door of paradise was opened to him. When we carry the Lord’s cross, we can be sure that he will remember us.

That which we see in the Gospel, we see every day on our television screens – women, wives, and mothers, with hearts broken because of humanity’s inhumanity. As we look at the cross, may our eyes be open to the misery inflicted on the innocent of our world.

St Luke made a simple but heart-breaking observation, one which may cause you and me to hang our heads in shame - *“All his friends stood at a distance”*. We call ourselves the friends of the Lord. But how close to him do we really stand? Joseph of Arimathaea, that courageous and decent human being is an example for us. We see in him one who does the right thing, even in very difficult circumstances.

My friends, in the narrative of Jesus’ passion, we encounter fear, anger, fickleness, lack of integrity, cruelty, coarseness, and distance, as well as helpful service, compassion, courage, vision, and decency. St Luke, in his great narrative of the passion of Jesus Christ, challenges us to look, as into a mirror, that we might catch a glimpse, or more than a glimpse, of ourselves, and thus learn to pray:

*“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”.*  **Amen**