

## **WW Good Friday 2007**

### **In the garden**

Last Sunday, Palm Sunday, we arrived with Our Lord at the gate of the city of wrong, as Rowan Williams called it. Our Lord paused for refreshment and then went in. This is a journey that he did not shirk or evade. Neither must we. He faced his demons straight on. So must we. We embark on a journey through Jerusalem, a journey into our souls. Our Lord during this journey abandoned his will, abandoned his self, and by his passive suffering he absorbed the evil into himself. This takes great courage. Let's see how we get on as we go with him.

O let me see thy foot-marks, and in them plant mine own.

### **Denials**

Peter's denials got him out of a difficult situation and saved his skin – for the moment. But later, he wept, overcome with remorse. It is hard to read or hear any of today's news without being confronted by denials. How can a secretary of state deny responsibility for her system of allocating doctors' jobs that has so demonstrably failed? How can a head of state deny his part in a situation that sees three quarters of his people starve while he lives in luxury?

Do we deny the truth simply because of our need to save face? But it is not the face that suffers, as Peter found out. It is the inner self, that inner sanctuary of the soul that is the Christ within. It is myself that I harm when I deny what is evident to others.

Lord, help us to see ourselves as others see us, and give us courage to face the truth.

### **Mob justice, crown of thorns, away with him**

The Times, March 16, 2007. Attack in North Kensington. Last night police sources said that the victim had been a "nice lad" and a promising A-level student who had never been in trouble with the police. His family live in North Kensington. A young man was surrounded by the gang. A witness said: "Some of the gang had armed themselves with 3ft wooden sticks from a skip. It was almost like a lynch mob. They were all ganging up on that one poor lad." Witnesses say that teenage girls egged on the attack with shouts of "Kill him, kill him" before the victim was surrounded. At one point the victim raised his arms to fend off blows from sticks. A resident was in her kitchen when she heard a girl shouting. She said: "I opened the window and then I saw this young man lying on his back in a pool of blood. The girl was still there — she was crying and was on the phone."

Lord, give us the strength to stand up for you, and not to be seduced by wrong.

### **Pilate wriggles**

Pilate was not altogether a bad man. He needed to please his superiors. How often have I felt like that? He could not afford to let Caesar get the impression that he couldn't control the crowd. He needed to placate them. How often have I done that? So he tried to wriggle out of responsibility. When the Glasgow express crashed near Kendal last month, Richard Branson was on the scene, within minutes almost, crowing that it wasn't anything to do with him. It is most certainly to do with him and with us all. We are all responsible for electing the government that regulates the railways. We are all responsible to some degree.

- First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.
- Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.
- Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.
- Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Lord, help us accept responsibility for our actions, and their consequences. Let us not try to shift the blame on to the shoulders of the innocent.

### **Holy Scripture: It is finished**

Harry Williams was chaplain at Trinity College Cambridge in the 1960s and was there when the former foreign secretary R A Butler ("Rab") came as Master. Williams writes in his autobiography "My favourite memory of Rab as Master is something which he wouldn't have remembered. It was his spontaneous reaction to the Passion story in St John's Gospel, which was read with intervals of appropriate music. As we came out of chapel he said to me with an obvious lump in his throat: "Terribly sad story that." After having had to fill my head with what the wordy theologians had written about the fourth Gospel, it was refreshing and moving to hear Rab's immediate, instinctive reaction to it.' It is the immediacy of the story, the circumstantial detail and the sheer authenticity that tell me that all this happened. That people are indeed cruel. God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. That is love. Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man*.

### **Holy Scripture: In the garden**

Through our denials, through *our* misjudging the innocent, through our own passing the buck, and through our own failing to stand firm against pressure, we are all there at the crucifixion, hammering in the nails. As R A Butler said, this is a terribly sad story. But it is not hopeless.

We look forward to the empty tomb. We look forward to regeneration, refreshment, renewal that comes after the darkest hour. And in our daily lives, we do not need to beat ourselves up after each slip, each mistake. We fall short, repent and are forgiven, and move on – crucifixion followed by resurrection. The most difficult part of this might be forgiving ourselves, but we if we imagine that our fault is so bad that not even God can forgive us, we are guilty of even greater sins – that of spiritual arrogance presuming to know the mind of God, and Judas' sin of inverted pride that his sin was too grave to be forgiven. God will forgive the true repentant – that is the Christian message.

The story does not stop today: today is, to be sure, a crucial (pardon the pun) phase, along with Incarnation, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. But today we are at the lowest point. But metamorphosis and rebirth will follow, and the butterfly will emerge gloriously resplendent. This is a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal spiritual re-incarnation. *Man enters God*. This is salvation.

We started in the garden, and now we're back in the garden. We see the door in the wall covered by ivy. And furthermore we have found the key.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. T S Eliot

O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end; and then in heaven receive me, my Master and my friend.