

Introduction

Good Afternoon everyone. Welcome to St Paul's on this Good Friday afternoon as we gather for three hours at the foot of the cross.

What we will do at this service is to do the liturgy for Good Friday which includes three readings including the Passion reading from the Gospel of John. After this reading and before continuing with the Liturgy of the Day I will spend some time looking at episodes from John's Passion story. The passages chosen fit into our Holy Week theme of "From Darkness to Light" What I hope to do is to give some input and then following it with a time of prayer and meditation. The times of meditation and prayer will follow different styles of prayer so it will also be an opportunity for you to perhaps experience a way of praying or meditating which you haven't experienced before. Each section will be interspersed by hymns and songs. If you wish to leave before the 3 hours are complete could you do so during a hymn and leave the service sheet for those might be coming at a later hour. A plate for a Lenten offering will be available – the money collected will be used for the Rector's discretionary fund to assist people from this parish who are in need.

After we've meditated and prayed on five episodes from the passion we will return to the liturgy of the day which will include the general intercessions, the reproaches and the adoration of the cross.

Let us now keep a moment silence before we begin this service formally with the Liturgy of the Day starting on page 188 of an Anglican Prayer Book.

In a Garden

Our story begins in the darkness of night and in a Garden. Many of you have been to the Garden of Gethsemani. I haven't but I looked at some images on Google. It appears to be a very peaceful grove of very ancient looking olive trees. I wonder what it was like when Jesus went there?

In the DARKness of this Garden, the Son of God was betrayed by a disciple. What was Jesus doing in the Garden? Why did he go there? Well, we know that Judas told his allies that he knew where he would be, so perhaps Jesus enjoyed walking there after his evening meal. But perhaps it was more significant than that.

Today we are not steeped in the scriptures as perhaps the people of Jesus day were. I know that Prof Walters of Rhodes University English Department used to tell his first year students to go and read the bible because the English Literature they were going to study would be steeped in scriptural references which they would miss unless they had read the bible thoroughly. So, too, in the NT there are biblical references to OT themes and concepts. These are not explained or written in bold or highlighted with a brightly coloured highlighter. Everyone knew these references so there was no need to explain them.

What and where was the Mount of Olives? It is a mountain ridge east of and adjacent to the old city of Jerusalem. It is named for the olive groves that covered its slopes. The southern part of the Mount was the burial grounds of the ancient Judean kingdom and the Mount has been used as a Jewish cemetery for over 3,000 years, and holds approximately 150,000 graves. The Mountain ridge is divided in two parts with a deep valley running between the two ridges. The valley is the so-called Valley of Jehoshaphat or the Kidron Valley, through which flows the Kidron stream, which encircles the city in a slight curve to the east, before turning SE to flow down the long valley to the Dead Sea.

Being so close to the City of Jerusalem, it has played a part in its history and the readers of John's gospel would know this history. It was the route of David's flight from Absalom in the time of the palace rebellion with the betrayal of David's trusted adviser, Ahitophal and, significantly, was the route of Christ's approach for the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, for it was there that the acclaiming multitude met him. Another significant OT reference to the Mount

of Olives is the scene of the theophany, when God spoke to the prophet Zechariah predicting the future fate of Israel. It is a rather obscure apocalyptic passage which could fit either into a description of the exile of the two kingdoms or some future apocalyptic event.

Perhaps it was this that Judas Iscariot was hoping for when Jesus kept on making his way to this Garden. But it just wasn't happening, and Judas, in his frustrations perhaps decided to force the issue by bringing the enemies of Jesus to arrest him. Perhaps he was hoping for a super-dramatic response. Listen to what Zechariah had prophesied. [Zechariah 14] *See, a day is coming for the Lord, when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your midst. 2For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. 4On that day his feet shall stand **on the Mount of Olives**, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and **the Mount of Olives shall be split in two** from east to west by a very wide valley; so that half of the Mount shall withdraw northwards, and the other half southwards. 5And you shall flee by the valley of the Lord's mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. **Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.***

"Then my Lord my God will come". That is what Judas was hoping for and **that is** what happened but not quite in the way either Zechariah predicted or Judas hoped for.

"My Lord, my God" does show himself but in Jesus. Notice how John describes the response: *Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' 5They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. 6When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. Why? Why fall to the ground? John is telling us and his readers that these men, sent out to capture and arrest Jesus realise that he is more than some nutty politically dangerous itinerant preacher from Galilee. So they step back and fall to the ground.*

Here in the garden was a theophany, John proves it by this verse: *they stepped back and fell to the ground.* God has made God's presence know among humankind in Jesus and all humankind can do is fall down and worship.

But the story is long from finished. In fact it is only just begun so John goes on: *Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' 8Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' 9This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' 10Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'*

Jesus is in darkness of night in that garden; Jesus is facing the darkness of a trial which he knows will end in a death sentence. Jesus is facing the darkness of being viciously put to death. And how does he respond? By saying: *'Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'*

So often as we contemplate Jesus and the cross we think of Jesus as the Son of God, God's own son suffering and we feel we cannot compare his suffering with ours. We seem to think that our suffering is insignificant compared with his. And then we justify it by saying, "It was easier for him because he knew that after he had been in the tomb for three days he would rise again and be at God's right hand." We forget that Jesus was fully human as well as being fully divine. His suffering was as real to him as it would be to us in the same situation.

We have all suffered in our lives. For some it has been one long ongoing suffering; for others, perhaps moments of short sharp suffering. Whatever forms our suffering might take, we are human, like Jesus. Like Jesus can we drink from the cup that our Father has given us?

I am not going to say something simplistic, like “If you believe in Jesus, you won’t suffer” or “Accept Jesus as your personal saviour and your suffering will be easier.” No, but your suffering can be made easier. How? By knowing that you are loved. Love heals our suffering. Who loves us? God – God is love. Now that also sounds a bit simplistic and a kind of brush off – like Marie Antoinette telling the hungry peasants to eat cake because they couldn’t afford bread.

When I say God loves you, I’m thinking of Teresa of Avila’s statement about us being Christ hands feet and eyes:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks,
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
Christ has no heart on earth to love others but yours and mine.

Two Russian peasants were sitting drinking in a tavern. Glass after glass of vodka was being consumed in order to forget their harsh lot, their suffering. One turned to the other and said: ‘Ivan, do you love me?’ – ‘Of course I love you, Gregor,’ replied Ivan. They drank some more vodka and Gregor turned to his friend again: ‘If you love me, tell me where I hurt most!’ - ‘How can I possibly know?’ replied Ivan. ‘Then you do not really love me,’ said his friend.

Hymn: The Love of God comes close

Meditation:

I want to spend this time of meditation thinking of the suffering of others, but not in a ‘let’s-feel-sorry-for-them’ sort of way but by participating in their suffering through meditations written in the first person and read as such by members of our congregation. It does not imply that readers themselves have suffered in the way that they are describing in the prayer. These meditations are written by Fr Michael Hollings.

A RELATIVE ABUSED ME - Mapitiso

Lord, how can I love a relation who would do this to me? How could he do it? I hide the terrible knowledge from myself - until, once again a friend walks away, I lose another job, I run from being close to anyone. And I blame him. I blame him for everything - for my disgust of myself, for my irrational guilt, for my burning anger. Lord, I hate myself, and I hate him. If you love us, your creatures, Father how can you allow such terrible things to happen?

I don't understand. But I remember Christ on the cross and know you allowed that too. I cling to that because through suffering, you taught us to love. Please teach me to love and to forgive.

A BATTERED WIFE - KPP

Lord, I did love my husband once. But now that love has changed to fear. Even when he is calm, I am tense, waiting for the next outburst. I can't breathe when he is near. It's like living with a volcano; sometimes there's a glowering

silence, sometimes an eruption so terrifying I'm left cowering, battered by words or fists or both. What have I done. Lord. Where did I go wrong? I long to run away but I've nowhere to go.

You wanted to run away once. You asked your Father to take your suffering away from you if it was his will. I often think of you in the garden of Gethsemane. Because you went through that, in terror of imminent violence, I know that you understand and are with me. Help me to be courageous. Show me how this awful situation can be broken. Be with me, Lord.

DRINK - DAP

My father comes home nearly every night blind drunk. He shouts abuse at all of us over and over, slams doors and makes my mother cry. We three children are too young and too scared to be of any help. I love my father when he is not drinking and try to tell him that he shouldn't drink. He promises to try but always weakens. Please God, help our family to try to find a way of coping with this problem together.

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE - DAP

You know I have been depressed, Lord, for so long. At last I could not bear it any longer. I took all the anti-depressant tablets the doctor had given me. I didn't want to be saved. I wanted to die. I was at the end of everything. But Lord, you did not let it happen. They found me and the doctors pumped me out. Everyone was very kind. Thank them for me, Jesus. I can't feel it in myself to thank them. You see, I'm sorry and I'm not sorry. I did want to die and I'm afraid I may try again. Will you give me a shake or something, because I'm so depressed? I see no way out.

Organ Prelude on Rhosymedre – 4min

Peter's Denial

I'm no country dweller. I've only heard cockcrows once or twice in my life and they always woke me up when I could have slept longer.

I suppose it can be said that that was why God made roosters. To serve as trumpets of the morning. To signal that a new day has come. To rouse the sleepers from their beds.

Peter knew all about roosters. After all, he **was** a rural dweller. He had heard roosters crowing since the day he was born. The rooster's crow meant, "Wake up! Get up! A **new** day is beginning!"

Over the years he had heard that sound a thousand times or more. But of all the times and of all the roosters, I am sure that he only remembered one time and one rooster and one sound.

It happened that Friday morning in Jerusalem. The rooster crowed, and Peter never forgot it. As long as he lived, he never forgot it, and he never tired of telling the story. In fact, he told the story so often that it was written down four different times—once by Matthew, once by Mark, once by Luke, and once by John.

And the story itself was repeated over and over again by the first generation of Christians. They never forgot it and they never tired of telling it. It became one of the most familiar and best-loved parts of the gospel story.

And for 2,000 years this story—told and re-told, embellished with vivid detail—has encouraged Christians in every land. Wherever the story of Jesus' arrest is told, the story of Peter and the rooster is sure to be told as well. We love this story because we understand it and because we can see ourselves in it. Few Bible episodes speak to us as this one does.

Many commentators divided this story into two parts—Part 1—Peter's Fall and Part II—Peter's Getting-Up Again.

Let's begin with Peter's fall:

15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.'¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.'²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?'²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' This was Denial By Deception

Peter had to think fast. Instinctively, he muttered out the oldest dodge in the world, "I don't know what you are talking about." That's right. Just play dumb. Act like you don't know what she's talking about.

And it worked. Or at least Peter thought it worked. But as he stood around the fire talking to the soldiers, he noticed two or three people looking at him closely. Too closely. Too carefully. One or two were nodding in his direction and whispering. *They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.'*²⁶ A second denial.

²⁶*One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?'*²⁷*Again Peter denied it. At the very instant the words flew from his mouth, a rooster began to crow. That was the third denial.*

What possessed Peter to deny knowing Jesus? The answer is not difficult to find. Peter was scared and he was tired. That doesn't excuse his conduct, but it does make it understandable. After all that had happened, Peter finally runs out of strength.

Peter never expected to be questioned by a servant girl. Her question caught him totally off-guard, and he blurted out an answer almost without thinking.

That's part of the irony of this story. Peter denied Christ to a servant girl. Not to the high priest. Not to a soldier. Not to anyone important. But to a menial maid.

Peter was no coward. Just two hours earlier he was whacking off somebody's ear. He knew the risk involved in going to the courtyard of the high priest. Peter was impulsive. If he had been brought before the high priest he would have said, "Yes, I am a follower of Jesus" and with a smile on his face, he would have followed his Master to the cross. That's the kind of man he was. But he lied about knowing Jesus. And one lie leads on to another.

It is interesting to note that Peter fooled only himself. The others never really believed him. They sensed he was lying. Something in his face and the tone of his voice gave him away.

And so it was that Peter—the "Rock"—had crumbled in the critical moment. He had denied his Lord not once, but three times. It was a failure he would remember for the rest of his days. As we think of it, let us take to heart the words of I Corinthians 10:12, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall."

The second Part of this Peter Story is Peter Getting Up Again. Here were four steps in Peter's return to the Lord:

Step 1. The Rooster's Crow. The gospels are unanimous on one point. The rooster crowed at the exact moment of Peter's third denial. As the very words flew out of his mouth—at that very instant—from some-where off in the distance a rooster began to crow. The rooster crowed, and Peter remembered.

Suddenly it all became clear to Peter. How rash he had been only six hours earlier, how cocky he had been, how confident of his own strength, how sure of his own abilities. The sound of the rooster meant, "Peter, I warned you this would happen and you didn't believe me."

Step 2 of Peter's recovery. The Look of Jesus. Luke's account of this story contains one detail the others omit. Luke 22:61 says that when the rooster crowed, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." Since this was the middle of the night, it must have happened just as the guards were taking Jesus from his interview with Caiaphas to his trial before the Sanhedrin. Evidently the guards were leading Jesus through the courtyard just as Peter was denying Christ for the third time. In that tiny moment of time, Peter cursed, the rooster crowed, Peter looked up and saw Jesus looking directly at him.

By this time Jesus' face is black and blue, his eyes almost swollen shut, his cheeks bruised and covered with spit. A trace of blood trickles from his lips. Even though it is in the dead of night, Peter can see him perfectly in the firelight. And Jesus can see Peter.

He doesn't say a word. He looks at Peter who has denied him for the third time. Everything has happened just as he predicted.

- It was a convicting look. "You said you did not know me. Look at me, Peter. Look at me. Do you not know me?"
- It was a compassionate look. "Peter, how weak you are. Now you know that without me you can do nothing."
- It was a commissioning look. "Weep, Peter, and remember your words. Then go and strengthen your brothers."

Step 3 of Peter's recovery. The words of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all stress that when the rooster crowed, Peter remembered the words of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." It was this memory more than anything else that brought Peter back to God. Not only had Peter fallen, he had fallen after his vain boasting. It had happened just as Jesus predicted. Those words—spoken in love—had lodged themselves deep within Peter's mind. So much had happened in those few hours that Peter had forgotten. But at the opportune moment, he remembered what Jesus had said.

Step 4 of Peter's recovery. Peter's tears. The words used mean that Peter wept bitterly. They are a sign of his deep repentance. He realized at last what he had done, how far he had fallen, how his denials had hurt the Lord. Tears are good if they lead to a new devotion to Jesus Christ and a new determination to serve him.

But we will recall that Judas wept, too. His tears led to suicide; Peter's tears led to repentance. Tears are good if they lead to a new devotion to Jesus Christ and a new determination to serve him. We may weep and weep, but if our hearts are not made tender and open before the Lord, our tears do us no good. For Peter, his tears signalled the breaking of his heart because of his sin. As the Psalmist said, "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

So I think that Peter was fundamentally loyal to Jesus Christ. After all, at least he followed Jesus into the courtyard. The rest of the disciples wouldn't even do that. Peter didn't handle himself well, but at least he was there. His failure was terrible, but at least he cared enough to try and follow his Lord. That doesn't excuse his failure, but it does help us see the bigger picture that Peter was fundamentally loyal to Jesus Christ.

In the end, it was not Peter's faith that failed, but his courage. Peter never lost his faith; in the moment of crisis, he lost his courage.

Now there are two interesting facts about the way Jesus treated Peter:

1. He never criticized him.
2. He never gave up on him.

There is an important principle at work here. A bone that is broken often becomes stronger after it is healed. Something in the healing process actually makes the break point stronger than it was before. The same is true of a rope that breaks. In the hands of a master splicer, the rope once repaired, will be stronger than it was before. God can take us where we are broken and make us stronger than we were before.

Peter did much more for Jesus Christ after his fall than he did before. Before his fall, he was loud, boisterous and unreliable; afterward he became a flaming preacher of the gospel. Before he was a big talker; afterward he talked only of what Jesus Christ could do for others. He was the same man, but he was different. He was still Peter through and through, but he was so much more mature and sensible.

There is much in this story that should encourage us. It was not the real Peter who denied the Lord; it was the real Peter who followed him into the courtyard. It was not the real Peter who cursed and swore; it was the real Peter who said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." When the Lord looks at us, he doesn't look at us and see only our failures. He sees beyond our faults to the loyalty underneath. He sees our pain, our tears and our earnest desire to please him. He sees us in our faltering attempts to follow him.

No story in all the Bible gives us more hope. If Peter can fall, anybody can fall. If Peter can come back, anybody can come back.

Imaginative Contemplation on Peter's denial of Christ.

In our time of prayer and meditation I want to us a prayer technique called imaginative contemplation. In this way of prayer we enter into a bible story through our minds and imaginations. We become present and imagine how we would react, behave, respond. Firstly we have to prepare ourselves for this so

Let us Enter into this space.

Relax.

Quiet down.

Breathe in.

Hold.

Breathe out.

Breathe in.

Hold.

Breathe out.

Be still.

Relax.

Let all your worries fly away.

Breathe in.

Hold.

Breathe out.

It is cold.

Someone has built a large open fire to keep warm.
You are standing next to the fire.
A lot of people do the same.
Your mind is exploding with thoughts.
Your friend, Jesus, was just arrested.
You and his followers came to this place where he is being kept.
The crowd is restless, hostile even.
What is it like to be in this place?
How are you feeling?

A woman glances over at Peter, a close friend of Jesus.
Stares at him.
She points at him.
She whispers something to the woman next to her.
She knows who Peter is.
What if she knows you are?
Are you safe?

She walks over to Peter, her friend behind her.
She says, "You are one of his followers."
Peter jumps to his feet and denies it, "No, I am not.."
Watch his expression.
Watch her reaction.

"Yes you are," she continues.
"I have seen you with that man they call Jesus."
Peter responds, "I am afraid you are mistaken."
Look at Peter's face.

She replies, "No, I am not, it is you."
"No," Peter says sternly, "Now get away from me."
He shoves her aside and walks away.
A rooster crows.
You look at Peter, stopped in his tracks.
He also heard the rooster.
You remember Jesus' words at dinner.
Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed.
None of you, including Peter, thought that it could ever happen.
Peter is one of Jesus' closest confidants.
What a terrible night this has been.
Let your mind replay the scene of Peter's denial.

Walk over to Peter.
Sit with him.
Listen to Peter as he tells you how he feels.
He asks **if you** ever did something like this.
Answer him.

It is time to re-enter this space.

Say good-bye for now.
Ask Jesus to lead your way into the rest of your life.
Say thank you.
Come back gently.
Open your eyes.
Remember.
Sit up.

By Mike Amodei

The Mocking of Christ

If there is one thing that I think all of us hate is being mocked by someone else. This is a real DARK moment in our lives. It is also remarkable how these moments linger in our memories. Ask me to remember what happened at the first school I attended in Durban and what immediately comes to mind is being slapped on the back of my legs by the music teacher for misbehaving - iow being made to appear foolish, being mocked in front of my classmates. The other thing that came to mind was my grandmother threatening to sew tags on my shirt tails so that she could tie them between my legs because my shirt tails were always hanging out. So the two things I remember about my first two years of school were events that made me appear foolish, events where my classmates could laugh at me or mock me.

John tells us that Jesus was handed over to the Roman soldiers who mocked him as a king. They took him into a courtyard, probably outside their barracks, put a tatty purple cloak on him and a reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, and then pressed a crown of thorns onto his head. Kneeling before him in false homage, they ridiculed him: "Hail King of the Jews!" And then they spat on him and struck his head.

After this mockery, John's gospel says that Pilate brought the pitiable figure of Jesus before the crowd and said, "Behold, the man."

That is a famous phrase. "Ecce homo" in Latin. Was Pilate saying to the crowd, "This person claims he is a King. Behold he is a man." Or did Pilate mean, This person claims he is God but just look how human he is - behold he is a man"?

"Behold, the man." We know that here was God's Son: so disguised, so hidden, so weak, mocked as king and wearing a crown of thorns! And evil seems to have its way with him. Yet one who sees in faith sees Jesus still a king. Yes, Jesus is mocked - how dark this must have been for him. Yes, evil seems to be winning this encounter with good. Darkness seems to be swallowing up the light. But we know because we know the end of this story, that evils victory is short lived. Evil cannot overcome Jesus Christ, our king.

Jesus was crucified for his claim to be the Messianic King who would rule not only over his people Israel but ultimately over all the nations as well. What is the significance or meaning of Jesus' kingship for us? Kingship today seems antiquated, especially in democratic societies where everyone is treated equal and free. God at first did not want to give his people Israel a king. Why? Because God alone was their King and they needed no other. Nonetheless, God relented and promised his people that through David's line he would establish a kingship that would last for eternity (Psalm 89:29). The Jews understood that the Messiah would come as king to establish God's reign for them. They wanted a king who would free them from tyranny and from foreign domination. Many had high hopes that Jesus would be the Messianic king. Little did they understand what kind of kingship Jesus claimed to have. Jesus came to conquer hearts and souls for an imperishable kingdom, rather than to conquer perishable lands and entitlements.

At the beginning of Lent we heard Satan tempt Jesus by offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus knew that the world was in Satan's power. And this was precisely why Jesus came – to overthrow Satan's power and Satan's

rule on earth. Jesus knew that the way to victory was through submission to his Father's will and through the sacrificial offering of his life upon the cross for the sins of the world. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he was mocked for his claim to kingship.

Do you recognize Jesus Christ as your King and Lord?

The scriptures present us with the choice between two kingdoms – the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The choice is ours. Which kingdom do you serve? The mockery and the Darkness of this Good Friday we know will end on Easter Sunday at the new light, the dawn of the empty tomb with the Lord risen from the dead.

To accept Jesus as Lord and King is to enter a kingdom of Light, to enter a kingdom that will last forever where righteousness, peace, truth, and love dwell. Yet Jesus' kingship is different; it is a kingdom of servanthood

“Behold, the man.” Pilate says. Yes, Lord, I see you brought low, and I believe you are a king. Help me to recognize your power whenever evil seems to conquer good, whenever the good are brought low. Give me faith to believe, even when evil seems to reign, that your kingdom will come. Amen

Meditation on the Passion – The Mocking of Christ by Fra Angelico

As our meditation I want to use a 15th Century painting by Fra Angelico.



The mocking of Christ appears in all four gospel passions. They describe the mocking of Christ, as he is blindfolded, struck repeatedly and spat upon. A crown of thorns is placed on His head and he is mocked as “King of the Jews”.

Most of the visual images of the Mocking of Christ are narrative in nature. They portray the scene as the artists imagined it may have looked. Usually Christ appears, either standing or seated, amidst two or more of his tormentors.

One by Fra Angelico is, however, different. It was painted by Fra Angelico in the period 1441-1442, when Angelico was engaged in decorating the cells of his fellow Dominican friars in the monastery of St Marco in Florence.

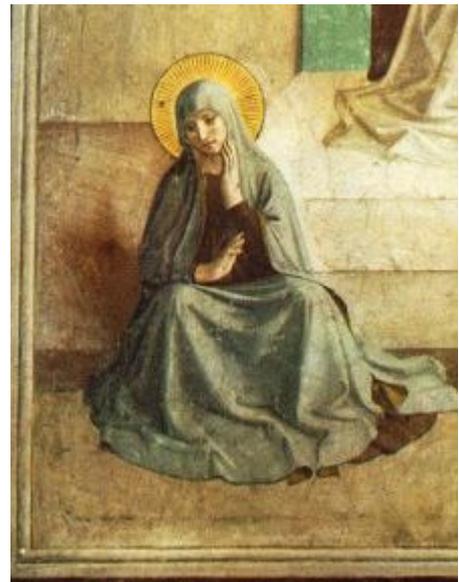
Fra Angelico, whose real name is Fra Giovanni da Fiesole painted a series of frescoes in the corridors and other common spaces and in each of the cells in which the friars lived. The painting located in Cell No. 7 is probably the most unusual of these very unusual images which are more visual meditations that visual representations of events.

In the centre of this painting we see the image of Christ, dressed in white, seated before a plain undecorated wall, on which hangs a green cloth of state. His eyes are blindfolded with some thin material that allows us to clearly see the outline of His closed eyes and nose.



On His head is a crown of thorns and behind His head is a cruciform halo. In His right hand He holds a segmented staff and in His left hand what appears to be an orb. In other words, He is shown as a king, but a suffering king. The image of the king crowned with thorns is certainly in the tradition of prior images of the Mocking.

However, around His head we can see what are without doubt the most intriguing elements of this picture. Instead of seeing His tormentors, standing by, we see that only the parts of them that are causing the torment. There are four disembodied hands; two on either side, and all of them are right hands. On the right of the picture, one hand is raised as if preparing to strike Him, while another right hand hits Him with a rod. On the left side one hand reaches up to pull His beard, while another, palm towards us, prepares to slap Him. And, perhaps most exceptional of all, a disembodied head (presumably the owner of the beard pulling hand) launches spittle at Him. Meanwhile, the head's disembodied left hand mockingly raises his hat.



These elements of the picture are odd enough, but the curious quality of this painting is compounded by the figures in the foreground. On the left sits, Mary, Jesus' mother. Her identity is certain because of her continuous presence in many of the San Marco frescoes. Surprisingly, her back is turned to the image of Jesus behind her. On the right, also with his back turned, sits St. Dominic, reading a book. Both of these figures are shown touching their chins with one hand. What does this mean?

First of all, note the separation in level between the central image of Christ and the figures in the foreground. The gesture that both are making, that of raising their hands to their chins, is a traditional gesture that indicates intense thought. We still use it today. Therefore, what we have here is not a visual record of an event, not an illustration of a text, but a visual meditation on the Passion. We are invited by it to enter into the same thoughtful frame of mind as Mary and Dominic. The book in Dominic's hand indicates that he is in the second level of *Lectio Divina*, that of meditation. *Lectio Divina* is a form of prayer where the scriptures' words are read and re-read and meditated on. In this painting Dominic has read the text and is now pondering it. What we are seeing is his thought. The picture is, quite literally, reading St. Dominic's mind. We are, as it were, "seeing" not with his eyes, but with his mind.

What can you see in your mind when we talk about the mocking of Christ? The right hand that slaps, abuses, mocks by doffing of the hat, another face that spits? What can we see in Jesus' face – not in the picture but in our minds? How do you feel about what you see? Share that with the risen Lord who is here along side you today in this very church.

Mary at the Foot of the Cross

What do you understand by the word faith? My TEEC assignment I'm marking says that there are two meanings of faith. One a religious belief as in the Hindu Faith, the Muslim faith and the Christian faith. And two a doctrine believed in. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said: "Faith is the realization of what is ^{hoped} for and evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). If we have seen it, we don't need faith because we have knowledge and experience. Did Mary have faith? A brief study of Scripture will show that Mary lived, acted, and moved always in the ambit of faith.

"Standing by the foot of the Cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother: 'Woman, behold your son.' Then he said to his disciple, 'Behold your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (Jn 19:25).

I believe that John, in this passage, wants to exalt Mary's faith by presenting two elements in reference to this event:

First, Mary's presence at the foot of the Cross. It is precisely at this place where the faith of the disciples and, logically, Mary's faith, is put to the hardest test. Her presence manifests her fidelity, her constant abandonment to the designs of the Lord's will, and a faith that is undiminished, unchanged and unaltered even in the darkest hours.

Second, in the words of Jesus, "Behold your son," Mary is invited to expand the horizon of her faith and the understanding of her role, since her motherhood is now moving beyond her dying son; it is been extended to the reality of a spiritual maternity for all the children of God. This last will of Jesus on the Cross became, for Mary, a new annunciation of a conception and birth: i.e. The Church.

Mary's faith was constant, not only present in the times of "apparent glory" when her Son was performing miracles and had many disciples that believed in him; it was just as strong when there was no "apparent glory," when there were no supernatural manifestations or happenings to attract attention, and even when there were not that many disciples to believe – except one, the one that was with her at the foot of the Cross.

The same faith that Mary had at the birth of her Son was the one she had at the Cross. It required much faith to have in her arms that defenceless baby, and to put him in the manger and believe that he was the God-man. It also required much faith to see her Son totally disfigured and defenceless on the Cross, waiting for him to be placed in her arms, to then be put in the sepulchre. Her faith allowed her to continue to believe that, regardless of what appeared to be, he was the God-man.

In Cana Jesus proclaimed that it was not his "hour," and Mary's faith and intercession, manifested in the form of a petition, achieved the first miracle, the miracle of the turning of water into wine. At the Cross, when it was in fact Jesus' Hour, Mary's faith and intercession, now manifested in silence, also witnessed the outpouring of the new wine, the blood of her Son being shed for our salvation, to quench our thirst for God and His divine life.

Mary's faith is a model for the Church: just like Mary, the Church has her own itinerary and her own journey to travel. It is Mary's faith that will teach the Church to be faithful, undivided, perseverant and trustful in times of glory and in times of suffering.

But what about the disciple who Jesus loved, believed to be John and his role at the Foot of the Cross? John's faith was put to the hardest test not only at the Cross, but from the moment of the Last Supper. This disciple was known to be especially loved by the Lord. When painful revelations were given by the Lord in that Supper, he, resting his head on Jesus' breast, wanted to have some answers, some understanding about what was happening. Maybe, by

this act, he also expressed his fear and his confusion at the announcements of treason, disloyalty, suffering and death. His faith was shaken to the point that, when Jesus was arrested, John ran away just like the other apostles.

It is very interesting to me that, even though John was also afraid, doubtful and running away from suffering, he appeared at the event on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross with Mary. Could we try to imagine what happened in John's heart that made him gain the courage to be faithful to Jesus on the Cross?

We do not really know what happened; all we do know is that at the foot of the Cross – where nothing seemed to make sense, where darkness seemed to have overcome light, where death seemed to have overcome life, where the messianic power seemed to have been lost, where goodness seemed to have been overcome by evil – there, at the foot of the Cross, were Mary and John, expressing the hardest thing that could have been expressed at that moment: faith in Jesus Christ, Saviour, Messiah, Redeemer, the Son of God.

Conclusion

Mary's faith was the most perfect one. She believed, never doubting that the things revealed to her would be fulfilled; and she believed with constancy, being firm in times of tribulation and darkness.

Meditation

Over the centuries the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant has shown a deep respect for Mary mother of our Lord. Over the last 100 years many Protestant writers have re-discovered many of the Marian elements in prayer. Perhaps the most famous is the Methodist minister, J Neville Ward in his book on praying the Rosary entitled, *Five for Sorrow, ten for Joy* where the different beads on the rosary are used to meditate on the five sorrows and the ten joys of Mary. There are numerous hymns in our Anglican hymn books, perhaps the most relevant for Good Friday being, Hymn 69 – At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping... the original Latin version is the Stabat Mater and many. Many composers have compositions containing these words and these are often sung in Passiontide.

Where I live and if the SE is blowing every evening at 6pm I can hear the Angelus being rung at St Michael's Church in Rouwkoop Road. The familiar pattern of nine tolls followed by three tolls of three and then ending with another nine tolls I remember well from having to ring them at Noon at the College of the Transfiguration in Grahamstown so when I hear them being rung here in Rondebosch I automatically join in saying the Angelus. The artist Millet demonstrates the response of the faithful to the ringing of the Angelus bell. Even out in the fields, the faithful become still and recite the famous words.



Although this is a prayer of thanks for the incarnation the final prayer links it to Christ Passion and resurrection. So let us say the Angelus together, praise God for the faith of Mary throughout the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord. Afterwards we will keep a moment of silence for your own prayers.

V. The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,

R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to thy Word.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Christ death and burial - Back in the Garden

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.'²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

We are in time of darkness. Other Gospels tell us that there was darkness over all the land. One gets the impression that it was like a total eclipse of the sun.

Out of this darkness came two calls from the cross, where Jesus was dying. Firstly, 'I am thirsty' and after drinking some wine, 'It is finished'.

Short phrases fascinate me. Especially where the emphasis is placed, as that can change the meaning completely. Take those famous three little words, **I love you**. If we emphasise the word I we mean I and not another loves you. If we emphasise Love we mean that we love as compared to something merely liking or even hating you. And if we emphasise the third word, you, we mean we love you especially and not another.

I wonder which word Jesus emphasised when called *It is finished*? Was he proclaiming that it – meaning his task given to him by God was complete or was he proclaiming that his life on earth as a human being was over and he would be returning to our father and his father in heaven. Perhaps if he emphasised the word 'is' he was ensuring that the forces of evil knew that he had completed his ministry, his task as a human in spite of the efforts of the Satan and his supporters. Perhaps, if he emphasised the word 'finished' he was saying that there was nothing more for him to do, now it would be up to us, humans to carry on.

I would like to do a brief prayer exercise with you now. I want you to take the phrase we used every time we said the Ten commandments were said during this Lent – Lord, have mercy. And I want you in the silence of your mind and heart to say this phrase emphasising the three words. First time LORD have mercy; second time Lord HAVE

mercy; and the third time: Lord have MERCY and think about what each means for you, what the Lord is saying to you in the different emphasises.

Silence

IT is finished; it IS finished; It is FINISHED

Back in the Garden

After his cry of 'It is finished' Jesus, John tells us, gave up his spirit. He is taken down from cross and he taken away to be buried

We began in darkness in the Garden of Gethsemane. We have moved through phases of Darkness and light. Now we are back in a garden as Jesus is taken to a garden tomb to be buried.

Gardens feature prominently in the OT and NT. Of course the whole bible begins in a Garden, where everything was ideal, perfect. Then came the fall. Our Good Friday Journey from Darkness to Light also began in a Garden a Garden of Darkness, where there is no perfection but betrayal and violence. We have journeyed through episodes from John's Gospel each containing elements of darkness and light and I tried to demonstrate these elements in the addresses and the prayers that followed.

Is this episode in the Garden now as Jesus is placed in the tomb, an episode of darkness or light? Darkness certainly because our Lord is dead and he is placed in the tomb, secondly, there was darkness over all the land and thirdly his followers must have felt the darkness in their hearts and minds at the loss of their leader – as perhaps you do after hearing the Passion read and being at the foot of cross for the pass three hours.

On the other hand I feel there are strong elements of Light. There is irony in this story because we know the happy ending – in fact the very day of this darkness and death is ironically called "Good" Friday. So already we are anticipating the light of Easter Morning showing us the empty tomb, the new light of the Easter Candle.

But also there is an interesting response from an enlightened Nicodemus, who brings spices to embalm the body and he lays Jesus in the tomb. Such generous love showed by Nicodemus is to me a source of light in the darkness of this day.

I ended my first address on The Garden by quoting St Teresa of Avila and I'll re-quote it again now:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

So as the body of Christ we must behave like Nicodemus who modelled his response on that of Jesus. We must be brave in the face of darkness by bringing in the light, by being Christ's hand feet, eyes ears and body. And so we must prayer for others, those who live in light as well as those in darkness. And we do so in the words of the general intercessions