

Palm Sunday – we began with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Started with a cheering crowd – ends with Jesus on the Cross, with his enemies jeering. What happened?

We will start with keeping things simple.

What letter does this represent? (*Hold up piece of wood*)

That letter is quite important to us if you think about it – we use it a lot.

We use to express opinions – 'I think Birmingham City are a great football team.'

We use it to express our affection – we might say to someone 'I love you'

We use it to encourage other people – 'I think you are looking great today'; 'I think you are really good at doing that'.

But 'I' is not always so pleasant.

We can use it to express prejudice – 'I think foreigners are lazy, or stupid, or dishonest.'

We can use it to express hatred – 'I hate you.'; 'I despise you.'

We can use it to undermine people – ‘I think you are stupid.’; ‘I think you are ugly.’

So the letter ‘I’ needs to be controlled a bit. In fact sometimes I need to cross the letter ‘I’ out. (*Put cross bar in place and hold up*)

Now what do I get?

That’s right a cross – the cross is, if you like, the letter ‘I’ crossed out.

‘I’ crossed out in many ways describes not just the death of Jesus but the whole of his life. That is summed beautifully in those words Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi as he encouraged them to model their attitudes and life on those of Jesus himself. I am going to read it from the translation, ‘The Message’.

Phil2:5-8 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

On one occasion Jesus told his followers, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” How can we think of taking up our cross daily? We find our example in that selfless obedient life of Jesus, life lived with the ‘I’ crossed out.

The idea of life lived ‘with the I crossed out’ is one that is very relevant to the situation we find ourselves in. But this has to go beyond words or gestures. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, a Church very much taken up by outward, out of the ordinary signs of the Spirit, used a couple of lovely expressions:

For we are the aroma of Christ *2 Cor 2:15*

I remember when I first arrived in Dublin in the late 60’s, walking up Grafton Street, smelling the most wonderful smell of coffee. In those days, Bewley’s used to roast their coffee beans in the front window of the shop and the fumes were vented out onto the street.

We are the aroma of Christ, a presence of Christ, a witness to Christ, that goes beyond words, beyond actions. We are called to be the presence of Christ, the ‘I crossed out’ Christ in the world of today. A presence that draws people in.

Then just a few verses later, another image springs to mind.

you are a letter of Christ, , written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. *2 Cor 3:3*

In this electronic age, we don't write letters so much these days. When I was younger, I used to loved receiving letters, writing letters. Letters from my parents, from friends, courtship letters; letters read not just once but brought out and read and re-read.

A life in which I seek to encourage people rather than undermine them; in which I express love and not hatred, in which we turn our back on prejudice and honour one another.

I will just close with the prayer of St Ignatius which I think gives us a lovely pattern for living in the footsteps of Jesus.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest;
To give, and not to count the cost,
to fight, and not to heed the wounds,
to toil, and not to seek for rest,
to labour, and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do thy will.