

When we are going on a journey to somewhere, people will often say to us "If you are going there you must call by and see ..." It may be a particular building, a view or maybe even a local festival.

I will often talk of life as a journey, a journey to God, a journey into God. There are things that distract us along the way, worries and anxieties, the distractions that can all too easily knock us off course. Holy Week is a time for refocusing on that journey to God, into God.. In that context I just want to focus on a place we must all call by and see on our journey of faith. Each of us at some stage must make our own journey to the foot of the Cross of Christ.

In our Gospel reading there were many who came together in the events that lead up to Jesus being nailed to the Cross.

There was Pilate - how did he see Jesus? A victim of an internal row among the Jews? He had certainly got the Chief Priests worked up. Jesus had been brought before him, the representative of Imperial Rome, for judgement. Pilate saw one who was powerless, intriguing but slightly pathetic and certainly dispensable. He knew he was there on a trumped up charge, he would try to save him but he was n't going to lose any sleep over him.

There were the Chief Priests Men steeped in centuries of Jewish tradition and history, custodians of the Temple, of the Law. For them Jesus was a dangerous radical, who seemed to put himself above the Law, who talked of himself as Son of God - that was blasphemy and the punishment for blasphemy was death. The tragedy was that those who looked for God's Messiah could not recognise him when he stood before them. He had attracted a wide following among the people - some of them were asking 'Could this be the Messiah?' He could cause trouble, trouble would give Pilate the excuse to

crack down. The Jewish traditions and worship could lose their privileged position in Roman Law which excused Jews from participating in the cults of the Roman Gods.

There were the people A few days earlier they had greeted Jesus as King, now we find them, egged on by their leaders baying for his blood.

There were the soldiers These were probably at the very bottom of the social heap. Hated by the people, despised by the powerful - they take it out on the poor sorry individual who is handed over to them.

These people, Pilate, the Chief Priests, the crowd, the soldiers are not so very far removed from the powerful, the privileged, the underdogs of every generation. While these events are located, at a particular time, in the early 30's AD, at a particular place, the city of Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover, there is a timelessness to these events. Each generation makes its own response to Jesus.

What do we see in the figure crowned with thorns, paraded before the crowd by Pilate?

Do we see a good man powerless?

Do we see an idealist, who overreached himself?

Or is he, and the message he preached - Love of God and love of neighbour, concern for the marginalised, for reconciliation, turning the other cheek, going the second mile - is all this simply irrelevant to the way we live our day to day lives?

Or is he who he says he is - the Son of the Living God, giving himself totally and utterly for the life of the world?

I turn to the words of our Epistle, that lovely passage from Paul's Letter to the Philippians. And here I see the paradox resolved. Jesus, Son of God, Son of the living God, powerless before those who would condemn him. In those lovely words from hymn 219 "hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered"

'He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.'

And why? Because for some inexplicable reason God loves us, each and every one of us, loves us to the very point of giving his all that you and I might live. In the face of such love I either walk away or I respond to that love and give myself totally; that as Christ died for me I might live for him, become more like him, showing something more of his self giving, self forgetting love in the world in which I live.

In the words of the Blessing for this day

Christ draw you to himself
and grant that you find in his cross
a sure ground for faith,
a firm support for hope,
and the assurance of sins forgiven: