

Sunday Homily 10 APRIL 2022/YEAR C

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

“Christ...was humbler yet, even to accepting death,
death on a cross. But God raised him high.”

Illustration

In recent years devotion to the Sacred Heart has become much less popular than it was some years ago. Many of the pictures or statues of the past probably don't appeal to modern tastes. However, the images of the Sacred Heart provided a tangible reminder of the love of God, revealed in the love of Jesus for his friends. In an appalling scene of poverty in the film *Angela's Ashes*, based on Frank McCourt's memoir of life in the Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s, the family have only a few pieces of old furniture, their ground-floor room is submerged in water, but they have carried with them a picture of the Sacred Heart in whom they continue to trust.

Gospel Teaching

The Sacred Heart helped people to focus on the gentleness of Jesus and the love Jesus had for those who had strayed away from their faith, or who failed in the moral life or had committed serious sins. Compared with the infinite greatness of God's love, sin pales into insignificance. God remains faithful and gentle whilst people are often fickle and cruel. This focus on the gentleness of Jesus is also found in Luke's portrait of Jesus. By listening to his account, we can hear certain themes that are characteristic not only of his account of the passion but of his entire Gospel.

Luke paints a picture of the gentleness of Jesus and the way in which he reveals his forgiving love towards those around him. Jesus knows that Peter will be tempted by Satan and will betray him. Luke tells us that even in this act of betrayal Jesus will continue to pray for Peter. Once he has repented, he will be restored in his relationship with Christ and then have the task of strengthening the new and vulnerable Christians who are the Church. The love of Jesus, shown in his prayer for Peter, is steadfast and continuous. He wants him to be a disciple but knows that he will often be a weak disciple. However, Peter will ultimately give his life for the sake of his faith. Growth in discipleship is usually rather slow.

The gentleness of Jesus is also shown in the way that he heals the ear of one of the people who come to arrest him. Only in Luke's portrait of Jesus does this occur. Jesus' care for those who are troubled is shown when Luke describes the way in which Jesus gives the women of Jerusalem a warning about the suffering that will befall them in the future. It is better to be prepared than unprepared. The forgiving gentleness of Jesus is further presented by Jesus' forgiveness of the good thief.

Jesus is ready to forgive him and welcome him into the kingdom. Finally Jesus surrenders to the Father and prays in trust, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

These aspects of Luke's Passion narrative reveal the depth of God's love, which touches all those who seek God's help. God desires healing, forgiveness, trust and conversion. People are invited to trust in the gentleness of Christ. Many of the crowd who shouted praise to Jesus during his entry into Jerusalem will quickly turn their shouts to "crucify him" when the mood changes. They are fickle; true disciples are called to be faithful.

Application

Holy Week is the most sacred time of the Church's year, in which we remember the great events that reveal that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be our saviour. Jesus offers healing to those who are sick and suffering. Jesus offers forgiveness to those who confess their sins. Jesus offers paradise to those who pray, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The response is left to each one of us: we can either be stubborn and trust only in ourselves, or we can ask for the help of God, and be open to accept it, like the good thief on the cross. Jesus presents a portrait of how we are to live and build a community of disciples who are the Church. This life is characterised by healing words and actions, forgiveness and trusting in the good of other people.

Holy Week invites each of us to journey with Christ in the events of the Passion so that after Calvary we may come to live in the hope of resurrection. Only when we begin to recognise the depth of God's love, revealed in Christ, will we become faithful rather than fickle followers.