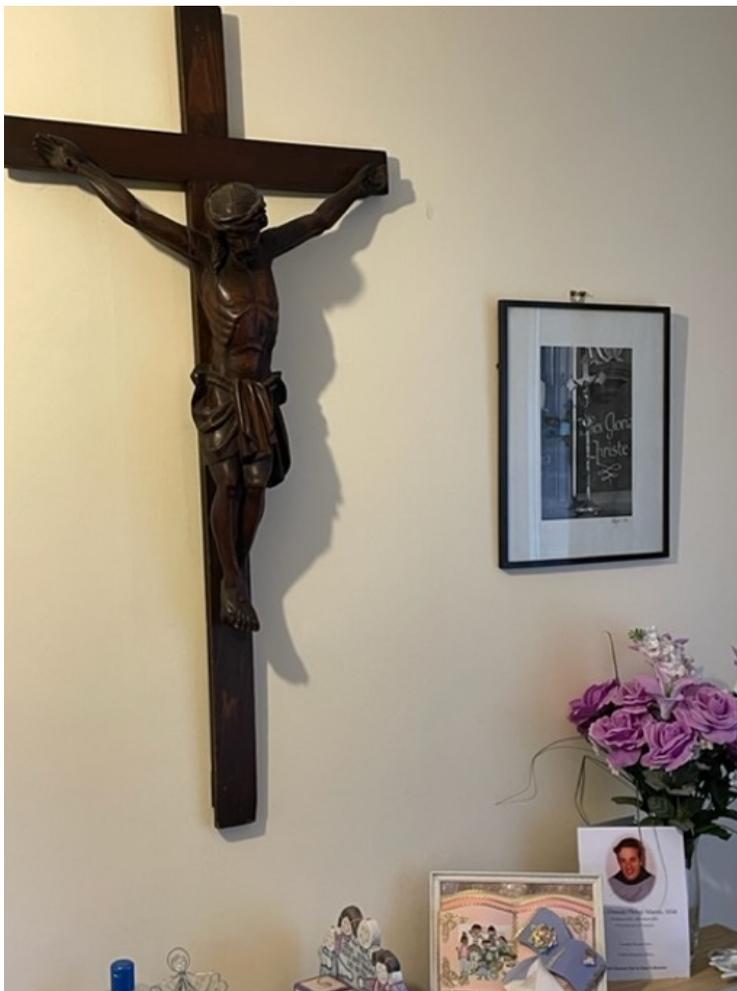


# THE WAY OF THE CROSS

## A HANDBOOK FOR HOLY WEEK



Offered to the people of  
Ukraine in their agony

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*Cover photograph*

The crucifix used for the veneration of the Cross at Kelham in the Good Friday liturgy.

The altar in the chapel of St Andrew's House CSA 1962

Everlasting flowers from Brenda ...

RIP Eileen, Evelyn, Rosie, Tony

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### **1 HOLY WEEK - PALM SUNDAY**

Jesus is coming to the end of His journey, and entering late into the courts of the Lord; we talk of life's journey, of its drawing to a close, and so it was for Him – the end of the journey coming in sight, but known as yet only to Himself. It is better when death approaches for us to share it with our families, for it is not good for a man to bear the knowledge of impending death alone in his heart; it is the last experience that can be shared with dignity with his loved ones, the preparation for that final crossing. But not so, for the Lord of all creation.

#### **Newmarket Sign**

In Newmarket there used to be somewhere a sign on the outside wall of a church, on the second floor of a high street building – no words, no text, simply a silhouette that tells its own story; we used to drive that way in the summers before the bypass was built, and I hope that it is still there. On the immediate right is the figure of a man leaning on his staff; he is as it were protector of the little group; beside him, and leaning forward a little is the figure of a woman, with one hand outstretched, just touching but not grasping, the clothes of a small boy who is starting to run ahead of her down a long pathway. The child's face is turned eagerly forward ... and at the end of the wall, at the end of the path where he runs, there is a tall cross ... Journey's end was already in sight.

#### **Jerusalem**

Now let us look at Jerusalem, the Mother city, to which Jesus himself came, as a pilgrim, to fulfil the duties of a good Jew; as a young lad of twelve he had found his place in the temple, indeed had lost all sense of time for a couple of days. I often wonder where he spent those two nights; asleep perhaps in some stone

corner, or in the house of some old wise man curious about him. Certainly he had then much to learn, but he surprised them by ... his perception; he asked questions that pierced so deep that they were fascinated and amazed ... perhaps they were even glad when his mother hurried in, and scolded him, and took him off with them back home. He had come at other times too, of course, and he probably knew the temple as well as any pilgrim to the holy city ... it was after all, his Father's house.

### **Pilgrims**

And so at this time, there would be the same air of excitement that comes when great crowds set out with a common purpose. Many people would be sleeping in the city, but far more would be outside; people who had walked and bivouacked on the journey would set up camp on the surrounding slopes. Pilgrims were going to make the most of the time, perform their duties, prepare for the Passover, perform rites of purification, see the city, and be ready for the killing of paschal lambs on the eve of Passover.

As night fell, fires would glow, old men would talk; children would cease their wilder games, and draw near and hear the old men talking of Moses, the Passover, Jacob's vision, the deliverance in the desert, King David, and his great son, Solomon ... and of the prophets.

They would be talking also of the hardship of the times, the cruelty of Roman rule, the double tongued diplomacy of Herod who ruled with the permission of Rome; they would talk of the hope of freedom, and its impossibility, ... or of rebellions, of the zealots who plotted against Rome, of the rebels who were caught and crucified ... Who, for example, had not heard of the slaves revolt a hundred years ago, and the six thousand crucified along the Appian Way to placate Roman anger ... And yet, there had been this later prophet, John; dead now, but what a stir he had

created. He had not been an easy man to hear, he had demanded real repentance from everyone because the kingdom was coming ... though he himself was only a messenger ... but what power he had ... till cut down to placate Herodias the king's wife.

He even trapped those wily holy men of the temple who made life so hard for the average Jew. Vipers and hypocrites he called them ... his time had come of course, but not before he had pointed out someone else ... this man from Nazareth ... So the conversations would weave in and out as the fires died down, and they slept with a sense of excitement.

### **Jesus**

What was this man going to do for them? would he be there? People looked for him but quietly, for he was wanted at the temple too, and not for a friendly chat. Somehow word must have got round that he was indeed there, and they could expect almost anything; after all, hadn't he brought Lazarus back from the dead? Too many people had seen Lazarus dead, for that to be denied, now that he was alive again, carrying on his life as before. Perhaps if he had power over death, he could throw out the Roman tyrants once and for all; ay ... maybe the angel of death would strike the Romans, just as it had the Egyptians so long ago ... perhaps ... perhaps ...

### **Temple**

Those who were uneasy, whose minds recalled the old prophets, persuaded themselves that this man could not really be a prophet ... after all, he did not keep the Sabbath, he had been known to pluck ears of corn, and even to heal a man on the holy day of rest ... as though he did not know that he should use his healing powers when the law allowed him to work ... He didn't keep the Torah, and mixed with all sorts of people that no respectable people would be seen with ... no, he could not be a prophet.

Then there were the others, a larger group, who smarted under the comments of the man from Galilee. Who did he think he was? Look at his delusions of grandeur, telling the religious leaders they were in the wrong ... worse still telling the common people to listen to what their leaders said, but not to copy what they did, because they did not honour their own teaching. Let him come, they would be ready for him, show him up, and deal with him once and for all.

Lastly, there was the closest circle round the High Priest, who saw that he was greater than the others realised; they saw that this one man threatened, as no one else, their whole system of worship, He was like an axe laid to the root of the tree, ... and there was not much time. This one man could raise such a following the whole nation could be wiped out in Roman retribution. If he chose to challenge them in Jerusalem ... they must somehow take him; but in such a way that it was the will of the people.

### **Disciples**

For the disciples this must have been a time of confusing excitement; no doubt as they moved about themselves these strands of feelings, of expectation, of conflicting ideas must have been in the air. It seems, that as so often with us, they heard most clearly what they were hoping to hear, the praise and expectation; no doubt some of them dismissed the rumours of danger from the Temple as small news against the groundswell of enthusiasm for Jesus.

Possibly Judas saw more clearly than anyone the danger, the profound danger; as possibly he saw more clearly the political possibilities.

Perhaps Jesus picked him out for just that quality of shrewd judgement; perhaps, as some have thought, his betrayal was an attempt to force the hand of Jesus, to make him choose the way that Judas knew he had the power to follow; or maybe he was just

disillusioned at the non-political turn of events. There is no doubt that he knew the danger waiting in Jerusalem.

### **Joy of Jesus**

Jesus looked at the joy set before him; all his life had been lived in obedience to his Father, and ours; all that the prophets had written of his suffering servant was going to be accomplished in him, and in this would be his final homecoming; the manhood so wonderfully taken from Mary was to be finally perfected, and He as true man would be forever drawing men and women after Him into the heart of God; in Him God and Man would forever meet, the final joy of homecoming.

### **Joy**

Is this how we understand joy? the joy of a homecoming? Joy is like the return for a short while of a lover or husband, from work or from war; the first greeting is the beginning of a long farewell. Every word and touch and gesture is touched with ecstasy and also with the inexorable agony of yet another parting, and the joy is shadowed by the pain to come; but not overwhelmed, for some day shall come an end to partings; someday shall come the final homecoming.

### **Jesus, joys and partings**

For Jesus there were many joys, and many partings; the first perhaps when one final day he hung up his chisel and plane and saw for the last time, swept the floor, closed the door of the carpenter's workshop, and left his mother, turning to the road and the wilderness; the joy of good work gave place to a wandering life. Another was the parting from his friends of childhood days, when filled with scorn, they could not see anything to wonder at in their old workmate and friend; the joy of friends ceased at the parting of the ways.

Later, the joy of many disciples, which ended when they walked no more with him, parting in unbelief. There was the joy of the many sick who came for healing and then went their way, parting in careless ingratitude; there was the joy of the wise, like Nicodemus who came to him by night, but feared public disgrace, parting in uncertainty. Many joys, many partings, yet all the time his eyes were fixed on the Father's will, and the joy of the Father's love for all men.

It has been a lifetime, a young man's lifetime coming to this final week, and for five weeks we have tried to keep him company; we have attempted to fast, to discipline our bodies, so that they may be better attuned to the voice of God; we have read the gospels, or other books; we have stretched our souls and hearts so that the King as he passes may not be unheeded by us. We have tried to come to true repentance, to shake off the sins and prejudices that bind us, and with which we bind others too ... and so we watch.

### **Entry into the City**

Jesus chooses the way of peace, for he is a king riding into a city in peace; so he chooses an untried colt, a donkey - on whose back you can see the marking of a cross, as though nature herself prepared for this day. What a tumult greets the King; the disciples can contain themselves no longer, and as they start coming down the slope towards Jerusalem, they cry out 'Hosanna' and wave banners of green branches, and in no time at all, a huge crowd gathers, and men and children snatch branches and run alongside, hailing him ... the King ... the Son of David ...

This is not just the prophet, the healer, this is the King, promised from the time of David; the word spreads through the bazaars and businesses and homes, and the streets are thronging with people, all turning out for the King. In the temple there are

more hurried conversations; the worst scenario has happened, he has taken the city by storm, and this will take some careful handling. No rash action, or they will never control the people ... so they decide to let him have his day as King. His one brief day of worldly glory, when his name was on all men's lips in glowing praise. Even Judas is caught up this day.

### **And We?**

And where are we before our King? If we own him as King, what does that mean? It means that he has a kingdom where He is supreme ruler; for he is not a president, or a constitutional monarch ... he rules by right. Like the kings and chiefs of old, he has gone out and sought his kingdom, has fought for it, and claimed it as His own, and now He shares it with his followers. It is not of this world, otherwise his followers in Jerusalem would have fought for him; it is the kingdom of men's hearts.

If we take him for our king, we are not casting a vote for a leader, or wearing the T shirt of some hero, or singing some battle song that takes our fancy; we are doing as men did in other days, we are placing our hands in his and swearing true loyalty to him until death and beyond.

So where are we, on a spring day in Jerusalem, before our King? Are we with the disciples, overcome with joy and expectation, boldly proclaiming Him? Are we those who want to use Jesus for political ends? then beware for that lies a bitter valley of despair. Are we with those in the temple, frightened, affronted by the claims of this man, out of all proportion and common sense? then beware, for they connived at his death. Are we with the high priest, defending the temple against all comers? then beware for it is God who rides as King. Are we with the children? then are we blessed, for he said that of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Look at your palm for today; the palm is for joy, the glory of Christ riding in as a king to his kingdom; but it is also a cross. The end of the journey of a human life. Jesus truly fulfilled prophecy when he rode in as a king, and the crowds hailed him with a conviction that was emotional and sprang up like thorns; and like thorns it was burnt up in the fire of hatred generated in the crowd before Pilate in only a few days' time.

We come to wait for Jesus, as he rides into the city; to watch with him in the long hours of Gethsemane; to stand with Peter near the courtyard fire; to weep on the via crucis with the women on the way of the cross; to see Veronica gently wipe his face; and finally to stand beneath the cross beside his mother, to see her receive his body in her arms and cradle in grief his thorn crowned head, finally to breathe the keen sharp desolation of the silent garden and the guarded tomb, waiting for the dawn of Easter Day.

*It was fitting that God, through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

*Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy before he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified, mercifully that we, walking in the way of the cross may find it none other than the way of life and peace. Through Jesus Christ your son Our Lord.*

*Let us pray for all who are suffering in our troubled world, and especially for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.*

### **2 MONDAY - CLEANSING THE TEMPLE**

The Way of Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross.

#### **Temple background**

Jesus had come at other times to the Holy city; to be redeemed as the firstborn by the offering of two doves; as a child, getting lost and found amongst the learned men of his people; once again, people would be bivouacking out on the hills; as night fell fires would glow, old men would talk, and children would listen ... stories of the great David and greater Solomon; the hardship of the times and the cruelty of Roman rule and the crucifixion of six thousand slaves along the Appian Way after a rebellion. All ... talk of the prophet John so recently beheaded, ... and the preacher from Nazareth.

What was he going to do for them? People looked for him after all the excitement of the previous day, when he had taken the city by storm, riding in on a donkey. But they looked quietly, he was wanted at the Temple too ... word must have got round ... hadn't he brought Lazarus back from the dead ... perhaps if he had power over death, he could throw out the Romans, and they would be defeated like the Egyptians long ago.

In the temple there must have been secret conversations going on; it would not do for anyone to think there was nothing to consider but this upstart arrogant prophet, but they were learned men, and knew they could not afford to be caught napping during the feast.

Well, perhaps he would have enough sense to lie low; those who were afraid of confrontation, or were squeamish about turning in a harmless visionary, hoped for that.

## **Our background**

And where are we ? We have been preparing, each in our own way; it is not the quantity of things that we do, but the quality that matters, and we are not the judge of that for only God sees into the hearts of us all. One way that has been out of fashion for a while is of linking prayer with fasting. It is good to abstain, to make do with far less than we normally eat ... we can manage on far less than we think we can. Our Lord fasted, forty days and nights ... just within the limits; you may remember hearing that at forty days a hunger fast becomes rather critical.

## **Fasting**

In Bedford there is a powerful witness to fasting in the Miracle Church. As a community or congregation, they begin a fast on Maundy Thursday, that will last until Easter Eve, when they will break their fast, and then fast again until their Communion in the Eve of Easter Day. This is not just an act of love, sharing in the Lord's hardships, it is also a means by which the mind is clarified. I wonder if it is too old fashioned these days to talk of clarifying fat ...? You take all the remnants of fat from the meat, bits of lard and bacon ends, heat it to boiling point and then add water and leave it. In time all the goodness comes together on the surface, and the dregs are disposed of in the bin. Fasting brings together all the diverse and wandering sides of our nature, binding them together, discarding on the way the unproductive and unnecessary bits of nonsense we collect from day to day.

By this discipline God is able to sharpen the vision, touch the heart and strengthen the will; it is also a means of sharing with a hungry world. ... as years ago, when Sister Joyce came back from Ghana, in the years of famine, she stood and wept over the full freezers in our cellar.

It is not unusual for people of that congregation to do a four-hour, six hours, maybe 24 hour fast as an aid to prayer ... and indeed, the Carer who relieved me for a week in 2009, a young South African woman, was doing a 12 hour fast with prayer when she came to us to start her work.

## **Judgement**

Whatever we may do, it is to the God of the living that we come, who judges not from the outside but from within. To those who are truly sorry, he is gentle. It was G.K. Chesterton who wrote of the scene where Jesus was left alone with the woman taken in adultery ... “Great mercy and great misery stood together ...” but Jesus had other words for those who prided themselves that they were safely on the right road, who used holy things as a cover up for their own greed, and were confident they had a hotline to God.

It was with these words that he came to the temple on Monday in Holy Week, following on his look around the previous night, before going out to Bethany. Remember He had not come to overturn the Temple worship; he was to be himself the fulfilment of all the sacrifices; his own presentation and Mary’s purification had been ratified by the offering of two doves, and now he was to be the completion of all rituals and sacrifice. He called not for prayer rather than sacrifice, not even for righteousness but for penitence.

The Pharisee and the publican had both come for the same reason to offer worship; the publican was bowed down by the sins he had committed, and no doubt the knowledge that being weak he would commit more; but he was the one who truly depended on God’s mercy; the other could hardly see God for his own self-image.

So the wrath of Christ descended like a hurricane on the backs of the dealers ; their trade was lawful, but their greed squeezed

every penny they could out of the poor who came there to perform their duties; they twisted and tuned the name of Yahweh to their tills.

### **The crowds**

And what of the crowds? Intent on their religious duties, and full of talk as they met up with relatives and friends. The news of last year, of different parts of Galilee, thoughts of the messianic kingdom where every man would sit under his vine and his fig tree ... no sign of it yet, with Herod still in the pocket of Rome, and taxes that crippled a man; but still, here in the temple is the sign of God's favour ... Nobody could have missed the dramatic events of the previous day, the entry of the Prophet from Nazareth ... and everyone would add their bit to the tale ... such a strange quiet figure in the midst of all the shouting, dignified too, but almost untouched by it. Many a zealot would have given his ears for such an entry.

So the talk ran on as they bought their animals for sacrifice ... And the dealers were probably doing rather well out of the hubbub, for with all the exchange of ideas the pilgrims haggled less about prices, and moved on, talking, as the cash rang down on the tables of the moneychangers.

The court of the Temple was large but would be full even so and in its centre the priests performed their office, just as Zachariah had done some thirty odd years before, when the angel spoke to him of the son his ageing wife would bear.

But this was not a day of annunciation, of good news; it was a day of crisis; the gossip amongst the servants of the sanctuary would be punctuated with anxiety about what that Jesus would be up to today. When the acts of worship were over they would need to talk together and plan a strategy.

## **Jesus in the temple**

He was already ahead of them. He reached the Temple with his own private thoughts; and by his very presence he convicted all that was wrong; but he was not content with that, he must openly and instinctively claim authority over it all.

“My father’s house...my house shall be called a house of prayer...but you have made it a den of thieves.” What a tumult! The animals set free and running to and fro in panic, the moneychangers groveling on the floor for the money tossed everywhere ... and the anger of the man ..., like an avenging angel of God, flying to and fro until all the cheating networks of scheming greed had been reduced to chaos.

Jesus lays down the second challenge; with the first he rode in like a king to a tumultuous welcome; now he claims the right to correct corruption in the temple.

## **Judgement in the way of the Cross**

He spoke for the weak and sinned against; those whose needs could hardly be heard, and he spoke to those who had the power to do something but instead colluded with evil. So often we can collude almost in ignorance, or for fear of repercussions.

Jesus never promised us safety in the way of the Cross, but he promised life; and just as he stood over against the temple abuse, so he stands over against us in our comfortable little ways.

If we accept life at his wounded hands, then we accept his judgement, the judgement too that he endured, and which led him and will lead us in the way of the cross. All our prayer groups, societies, celebrations, meetings ... they are all dangerous; at any time from within them may come a challenge like the thrust of a sword; even the sacraments are dangerous for they challenge our determination to have things our own way. Danger is part of life,

we are born in danger, and are often in danger of dying unexpectedly. Noah could have been too frightened to get out of the safety of the ark and face God and the new life and responsibilities ... perhaps conditions inside pushed him out more readily ... but what lay ahead? But he had to get out, and so do we, out of our comfort zone, live alongside the man of Galilee and face judgement. The judgment that has no room for cheats but embraces all penitents. And what is a penitent ? Just one who says “I have sinned....and I will try by God’s grace, not to sin again.”

If we stay within our chosen spiritual shell, engorged in spiritual overweight because we do not use the grace we have received, then the Christ of the Temple will overturn our little idols, and convict us of an inwardly blind religion.

### **The coming Cross**

So, we look at Jesus, steadily moving all the time towards the coming event, the Cross. Death has a way of concentrating our minds, of getting our thoughts into focus, of stripping away the unworthy, the inessentials.

Some years ago I knew a couple stricken with a terrible grief, the death of a child. It became a barrier between them, for while the father found God in the heart of his agony, the mother carried bitterness, well hidden, in her soul. There came a time when cancer laid its ugly hand upon her as well; yet in the knowledge of the way that leads to death, she found life, acceptance and renewed union with her husband and family. There was no further need to struggle in that fearful battle of bitterness, for she was going home.

So with Jesus; he is going home; through cruel agony of heart and soul and body He will embrace all the agony of men; there will be no place where He has not been. The judge of all, the living God incarnate, has many things to suffer,; but for the joy that is set before him, he will endure the Cross.

*True and humble King, hailed by the crowd as Messiah, grant us the faith to know and love you that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross...*

*Grant that what we do for others may also be done for you; let us be the servant of others as you were the servant of all and gave up your life and died for us.*

*Give courage to all who fight for the truth, and especially to those who fight for truth in Ukraine.*

### **3 TUESDAY - CHRIST OUR TEACHER**

We have seen Jesus ride in as a king, and we have watched him turn out of the temple all who dishonour it; now we move to the third act of this great drama; but mark you, this is no play that we contemplate, no representation of history long ago. Perhaps the greatest play about these events is still Oberammergau. There was a Passion Play once which related everything through the eyes of Christ upon the cross. These things of which the Eyes upon the cross spoke so vividly and poignantly happened at a point in time when God in history acted and suffered; these sufferings and actions are part of the whole life of Christ, and so we in a mystical sense, are made present to them; we in 2022 holdout to the Christ of eternity our love and grief as we watch him move day by day forward to the cross.

#### **Effects of the previous day**

Surely there must have been much talk on this third day, in a somewhat subdued crowd in the temple. Had the dealers, the money-changers crept back in again, by the time Jesus came in and settled down to teach the people? Perhaps some came back ready to dispute his right to upset them; others perhaps sat nearby, waiting to see what happened before they ventured back again. Maybe the temple guards were sent to protect them in their trade; no doubt the temple coffers benefited from their scams. Perhaps some were changing their ways, had faced up to their double dealing, and pondered on the words of this strange prophet.

#### **Priests' challenge**

No doubt everyone would be aware of the small authoritative group that made its way round to Jesus, and asked for his credentials;

after all, the leaders of the temple could hardly pretend to ignore the fracas of the previous day. But they were caught straight away by Jesus; he gave them question for question. “Where did John get his authority ?” and they could not give him answer for answer, for if they declared for God, they showed themselves in the wrong; if they declared against, the people would be in an uproar. There must have been many heads that nodded and laughed at their discomfort.

### **Declaration**

They are happy who dwell in your house – the teacher's house, the oldest and still the most powerful way of teaching; within a small and trusted circle knowledge and confidence are exchanged, respect and love nurtured.

The house of God should breathe the presence of the Lord, and having accused the unfaithful members of the household to their faces, the greatest teacher of the law has sat down to continue that accusation. Many prophets had come to Jerusalem and to the Temple and had quoted the wrath of God revealed to them, and foretold the end of unrepentant sinners and rebels. Here, now, is a new quality, for this man does not quote, he declares truth at first hand; can it be that here is the living God, the King, the Judge, sitting in the outer parts of the Temple; all are listening, something stirs in them, and they listen ...

### **Two Sons**

The story of the two sons is as familiar to us as to them; the father demands help from his sons, and gets a smooth answer from one ... “Yes of course I'll go ...” and a surly refusal from the other. “Can't you see I'm busy? 've more to do than run round on your errands.” Yet each one thinks further on what he has answered; perhaps there is no change of heart of the first, perhaps he never intended to go at all, and was simply keeping the old man quiet with a polite answer.

The second did not want to go at all and said so plainly, but afterwards his heart warmed towards his father and duty, and he went and obeyed him. Jesus knew well the smooth tongue and hidden heart of men, the bland lie that covered an unruly resentment, the insidious reason that weaves a justification for self-pleasing; his heart was with the open man who sinned and then was sorry; who saw his sin gathering like an oil slick off the shore and fought it as best he could.

### **The vineyard**

So he picked up the chicanery and deceit he had so fiercely condemned the previous day, and went on , to attack directly the Sadducees and Pharisees with the story of the slaughtered heir.

The stewards of an estate were bound to acknowledge the owner and send rent and profit to him, but these in their greed to get it all for themselves ill-treated the messengers sent to remind them of their duty, and finally they killed the heir ... Jesus, the heir to all Jewish history, stood and challenged the unjust stewards, who had shaped and bound tradition to suit themselves; in their very hearing he spoke to his listeners, implying that their leaders were corrupt - with self-interest.

He told of a wedding feast where the invited guests suddenly turned cold on the invitation, and of the master's anger, and of how the tables were filled with anybody, just anybody, that could be raked in from the byways; and this shaft went home, an arrow straight to the heart of the law men of his day, who were accustomed themselves alone to decide the worthiness of men by the rules they had contrived.

### **Caesar's money**

They in their turn then tried to trap him; stalking him like clumsy hunters in the woods, they laid a snare, only to find it spring and

catch their own feet. “What,” they said, “should we do about tax ?” You can feel the ripple of interest that always rises when you put your hand on a man's money, the resentment against Rome ready to flare up, and trap Jesus in its downfall. Like a boxer, he leans back with the blow and makes it serve his own purpose. “Whose is the money? Whose head is on the coin?” And now you feel the anger, as they feel the attack reversing towards them ... “Caesar's” is the reply and swift comes Jesus' answer. “Then pay Caesar his due – and give God his due too.” What a cut and thrust reply; they were defeated and disarmed, and chastised.

He passed on to the Sadducees who laid another snare. They might have known better than to try, with their softly softly approach, their pretence of seeking advice on a case of law. Brothers were bound to take on the widows of the family (as indeed had Jesus' ancestor Boaz, when he took on Ruth) in order to raise up heirs to look after the property.

But, in the case of the widow taken on by seven brothers in succession, they asked, when it came to the resurrection. “Whose wife will she be?”

What a sly way of attacking belief in the resurrection, and what a clever way of interfering by raising an issue that was hot and would split any group down the middle ... but Jesus, once again took the weapon used against him, and turned it back upon them. He did not defend the resurrection, he described it, and made the whole argument a platform for a claim that they could understand and resent even further. “The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” he said ... “God is the God of the living, not of the dead.”

### **The Listeners**

Look at the group sitting there, the disciples struggling and puzzling over the meaning of some of the things the Master said; the passers-by on their way to religious duties, stopping to listen a

little, and finding it was the prophet, hanging on in case anything interesting happened; and the little group of temple men putting their question, outwardly polite, smarting furiously over the mastery that Jesus showed.

And at the centre Jesus himself, his senses evermore keenly attuned to the passing time, feeling the rising pressures that would come to a climax, one only climax, when he would stretch out his arms to the wood of the cross; Jesus seeking always to open men's eyes and ears and hearts, to show them that it is not truth on the lips but truth in the heart that the Father seeks. Jesus affronted by the way in which these men of the temple judge everything with scarcely a nod in the direction of God.

### **Condemnation**

His anger breaks, and if he had not done enough already, this final challenge in the temple sets his feet on the *via crucis*, the way of the cross. Accepting the cross at our hands, at the hands of all men, he cries the great woes of the day ...

Woe, God forgive you – you bind heavy burdens of morality on people, and you love to be seen of men, admired, needed and made much of.

God forgive you - you go out for converts and turn them into something twice as bad as yourselves ...

God forgive you - you make a man swear, not by the temple, but by the gold in it, so that you can make him add a bit more gold, to pay for the oath.

God forgive you - you tithe and measure every little thing, but never look up to see who is unjustly treated ...

God forgive you - you wash the outside of the cup clean, forgetting the inside, and you think a little outer goodness will cover up the mess inside ...

God forgive you - men shiver when they walk over a grave, and you are like great marble monuments covering up dead men's bones ...

God forgive you - you build memorials to the prophets, and are sure that you would have been wiser in your ancestors' days, but you do the same all over again, killing the prophets ...

O Jerusalem. Jerusalem ... He weeps for the cunning that shapes ideas to its own will, the stupidity that thinks that God can be bought, the greed that would work all to the advantage of self, and the deceit that uses morality as a cover for even deeper sins ...

We watch with Christ, and the sound of his weeping is in our own hearts, for the hardness of hearts in our family of man. It is so easy for us to achieve a little contentment, to feel that we are honouring God with our help, that a little goodness here and there will balance against our stupid blindness.

We are blind because we do not see except in glimpses that this whole world is God's harvest, that this challenge of Jesus is eternal, we are there, and he is here; and he asks us what we have done, what are we going to do with all the world; not just the little bit of Bedford, or Milton Keynes, or the Midlands, or the UK, but all of it, and the universe and beyond. We are stewards for Him, and how shall we answer for the two thirds of the world, ill equipped and starving?

### **My Brother's Keeper**

Just as He calls the stewards of the temple to account, so He calls us. It is not that we can do everything that needs to be done, we could not even if we tried; it is to remind us that all the time our brothers in other places are hungry, starving, in prison, dying, despairing; it is not so that we should break our hearts for what we cannot do, but rather that we should begin to do the little that we can do, where we are now, not in some other more ideal day; that

we should hold everything as trust for our brothers; that while we live and work, and marry and have families, and walk free and see the beauty of the world, and of man's creation too, we should remember the rest of our family.

### **Vocation**

Are we ready like St. Paul, to have all things and rejoice, to have nothing and rejoice; neither is better than the other, each has its own particular difficulties. Time itself is a trust, and the time God gives fits exactly into the pattern that He weaves every day out of our choices. To answer his call may lead to the hospital, the cloister, school, the college of priests, to a wedding ring or the single life; no matter ... it is all on loan to us, and he will ask ...

“What sort of a life have you made, with your wife, your children? How is it with you, with your sweetheart, lover or friends? What about your talents, your car, your computer, your garden, have you respected them, cared for them, made the most of them, shared them ... or have you wrapped them up carefully and hidden them away ... and what ... what about your faith?”

If it be our job to build beautiful churches, or to clean them; to make a home with love, or work for peace, to clear up after others or write great music, let all be like a handbook for our worship of the great Teacher who reached to touch men's hearts in the temple that day, that in this our day we may answer the needs of his brothers and ours, and bring bread for the body and food for the soul.

For he is here with us, and we are there, with him, watching and sensing the pain; we watch so that we may never forget, that the image of this grieving Christ may be so imprinted on our hearts that we may recognise him everywhere. He teaches through the glory of the temple, the beauty of the world around, the joys and

sorrows of human nature... and always leading on to the Father, never turning from the cross, ever caught by the joy that is set before him.

*Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of sin and the depth of your love; in humble hope and fear may we place at your feet all that we have and all that we are...teach us generosity of heart in the knowledge that we are all in need of your mercy, but not to be afraid to stand up for what is right.*

*Bless with courage and consolation all who work and oppose brutality and injustice everywhere, and especially in Ukraine.*

### **4 BETHANY - CHRIST OUR FRIEND**

They are happy whose strength is in you; to dwell in the house is a happiness, and to walk in the strength of friends is to have a strong staff in our journey to lean upon.

#### **Pressure**

It is now two days before the Passover, and the shadows are lengthening. Jesus has had three exhausting days by any standards. He rode in as a king, turned the temple upside down, and then sat there, teaching, and condemning the religious leaders.

It had taken a toll of him emotionally, to carry alone the burden of his coming death, to take such challenging steps, to see the limits still of his closest disciples. Even now, they argued about such things as who should sit next to him in glory, and they did not hear him when he pointed out that between the present moment and glory there were hard and terrible things to be done and endured.

#### **Caring**

I have been told that at the end of the day, the eastern shepherd stands at the door to the fold, in the doorway, with just enough room for the sheep to pass one by one. He has by him a horn of oil, and water to hand, and as he calls each sheep, he gently runs his hand over, feeling for burrs, thorns and briars from the days journeying. He rubs oil in to ease the soreness, and round the horns for strength, gives it water, and brings it in for the night.

Even so in the midweek did the Lord Christ think of his friends. They withdrew to Bethany during the day, and he listened to their talk and watched their faces, and himself took some rest on this final day amongst friends. His disciples were confused, elated, disturbed; all was well, was not the Master with them? He had been

received as a king, men hung on his words, and no one dared to think of arresting him ...and yet, all was not well.

### **Jesus the Truth**

On the way up to Jerusalem, on more than one occasion, he had gone ahead, striding on with an intent look that brooked no asking, wrapping round himself a cloak of silence that was eloquent, but beyond them. Even during the great entry, when all men crowded round him hailing him as Messiah, king, Son of David, there had been a slight withdrawal that they could not place. Often in times past he had wanted to be alone, in prayer that they only dimly understood; there had been many things to make them think and reflect, from the water made wine to the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Peter and James and John should have been able to direct their thinking more clearly, for had they not been with him when he talked with Moses and Elijah on the mountain? It was true of course, that they were forbidden to speak of it until he had risen from the dead (whatever that might mean). Yet still they had not perceived that Jesus was not only the king, and judge of all, and the supreme teacher. He did not just talk about truths; he was himself Truth.

Still, they saw no final significance in this Passover; perhaps if they thought much about this talk of crucifixion, they took it as the extravagance of religious experience.

So indeed, today, some talk about religious fever when others are drawn to give more and more of themselves to God, whether by vocation or in ordinary daily living.

### **Cost**

How many families count it as a privilege when one of their children decides to serve God as a priest, or missionary, or as a

Sister? Remember, if you proclaim that God must come first, He may take you at your word, and it may be your son or daughter who answers His call ...

So, it was with the friends of Jesus. They knew that serving God was costly; hadn't they left their homes to wander around the countryside with Jesus? But somehow the talk of crucifixion seemed to be overdoing it; and even if the unthinkable could happen, it would be so senseless, such a waste; king, judge, teacher, healer, all wasted; no, not that way, they would think.

### **Simon and friends**

So, on that Wednesday, at the house of Simon the leper, they were confused, elated and disturbed.

It seems likely that Martha and Mary were there, whether helping or as guests; in a small village it could hardly be that Jesus' closest friends were not invited with him. It may well have been another of those occasions when Mary sat by him, supplying the silent human companionship and empathy that he needed. We have no information about Simon, apart from his leprosy. It could well be that he was one of the many once healed, still called the leper out of lifelong habit.

All we know is that he was glad to be the host to Jesus and his disciples and friends. Martha, as always with an eye for detail, watching the needs and tastes of everyone, showing her love by her bustling care, by now neither jealous nor resentful of her sister, who showed all her love by listening.

### **Disciples**

Judas was there; by now committed to betrayal, he was looking for an opportunity to betray him; he was probably something of a loner

among the others, distanced perhaps by learning and ability, and so any preoccupation on his part would not cause comment; the others probably eased any disquiet by talking of so many things that had happened, and most particularly the last three days and the feeling that all the pilgrims and the city itself were all for Jesus; especially since the temple authorities dared not touch him.

## **Jesus**

Amidst the chatter and the noise, the clatter of serving and the coming and going of others who called with Simon, sat Jesus; walking in his own mind evermore surely the way of the cross; his eyes on the joy set before him, looking not only along his own road of martyrdom, but down the unending road of martyrs ahead.

Within his human soul, joy and grief lie so close together, that they are one, and they are reflected on his face. Joy in the love of his friends, grief for the pain that was coming upon them.

That face of Jesus is often seen in our living experience. In the face of a young man intent on the priesthood, eating with his family, whose minds are set on other plans, looking at the unconcern upon his parents' faces, waiting to strike the blow that will shatter their dreams of a doctor, teacher, fitter or builder, a son in his father's trade. To set the course that will take him out of his family, away from his background, away from his friends.

In the face of a priest giving communion to a man about to die. In the face of a man watching his wife going about their home, just doing ordinary things – waiting to tell her that his papers have come, sending him abroad to danger; in the face of a doctor, sharing a cigarette with an old friend, before telling him that he will die before the year is out. In the faces of a couple on a station platform, drinking tea before trains tear them apart; in the face of a mother who sees that her son is grown up and glad to leave home ... and the face of another who buries her child.

## **Tears of things**

Jesus knew “the deep down tears of things,” the remorseless passing of time, and its finality; “The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on; nor all thy tears can call it back to cancel half a line of it; Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.”

On this last day he pondered lovingly on his companions, his ear attuned to every word, his eyes quick to search out the changes of expression, observant of them all. He knew that he could not shelter them; they had their own bitter valley to cross, in the shadow of his. All this was held within his soul, while around him all went on as usual at any other meal among friends, conversation crackled, laughter passed from one to another as wit sharpened wit; Martha came and went, Lazarus too, smiled – his presence a foreshadowing of death and witness to resurrection.

## **Mary**

Into all this suddenly came Mary, the extravagant,

Mary so open in her love and gratitude, Mary never thinking of what people might say, but with her heart almost breaking with love for the Lord. There had been a lavish anointing of his feet at another time; the time when a woman of the streets knelt before Jesus weeping wild convulsive tears over his feet, and drying them tenderly with her long and beautiful hair; the time when Jesus had given her back her lost dignity as surely as he effaced her sins with his purity and love. Perhaps as some have thought she was also this Mary, who came to him now with a king's anointing, pouring on his head this rich ointment, even as Samuel had anointed his ancestor David to be king.

## **Protests**

“To what point”, exclaimed Judas, and some of the others, “What a waste” ... What a reminder to him of the kingly quality of the man he planned to betray. What extravagance; all that wealth poured out

like a sweet smelling offering, a lavish sign of the greatness of God, of the great love that prompted it.

It was also a sign to startle, disturb, and proclaim. It startled the immediate company, interrupted their meal, drew their attention to Jesus seated in their midst; they were often talking and arguing over things he had said to the point of forgetting that he was there amongst them. It disturbed them, it was rather like a prophetic sign, and it brought to the surface that disquiet, that sense of something beyond their understanding that lay beneath all the chatter; and it proclaimed once again that here was Jesus the King. Nevertheless, He spoke differently of it, as he defended her against their criticism; she had done it, he said, for his burial; surely, now they would hear that; but not so, not yet.

Mary's lavish gift was the forerunner of art and beauty lavished on Christ in the church; mighty cathedrals and innumerable churches stand in our land, ornate with gold and silver, tapestries and carvings, glass and colour; signs to startle , disturb and proclaim that God, the creator of all things is worthy to be honoured with our best; they stand as places where beauty and peace can be found for a short while, by all men, but most especially by those whose lives are dark and weary and torn apart.

Such setting aside beauty for God alone is like the ointment freely poured over the head of the Lord; neither stop us leading more simple lives for the benefit of others, or caring for the needs of those who are homeless and starving; but we have first to see Christ himself clearly , before we can see him in all other lives.

Still, the beauty that proclaims the glory of God must send us out as messengers, or it is but an empty sign.

## **Night**

And so, after the interruption the meal went on, and they talked among themselves about it; conversation such as has been heard

many times since. “Well, Mary's like that ... all emotion, we know that; and after all she did not have to make such a public display of it ... it would have been better in private ... what's so special about her, anyway, that she should go and do that ...”

Later on, on another day, the words would return to haunt their grief. For now the talk died down, and night fell on the village and on Jerusalem, and they all slept. Jesus alone lay looking into the night, before he took his last night's sleep; after this night he would not lay down his head again, until he laid it on the wood of the Cross

*JESUS answered Andrew and Philip, “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...whoever serves me must follow me and where I am there will my servant be also...You are my friends...*

*Lord grant us to love you and your friends; fill with blessing the hearts of all who suffer, especially our friends in Ukraine, where families and friends are so harshly separated ...*

### **5 THURSDAY - THE BITTER VALLEY**

#### **Preparation**

Jesus has reached his last day; he will not sleep again on earth, until he sleeps in death. It is with great longing and yearning that He comes to this supper with his disciples; for some time now, He has had an arrangement with a friend in Jerusalem, ready for the time when he would judge it right to eat the Passover with them. There is an urgency that calls him, in the set of the face of Judas; he will have Judas at the supper but cannot hold him much longer.

He sends the disciples ahead so that they could prepare the meal. They must go to the temple to select a lamb, which must be unblemished, perfect according to the law, and killed in the proper way; they must dress it with herbs and have it ready together with bread and wine for the table.

Meanwhile Jesus has taken leave of his friends in Bethany and has come into the city quietly and unobserved. He makes his way to his friend's house, and there he finds everything ready in the upper room. They make their way up the stairs after greeting the man of the house and his family, and into the room.

#### **Authority**

Some of them have probably been there before; but whether they had or not, none of them could really miss the jars of water set there for them by the host, so that they could wash their feet.

Perhaps once again they had been arguing about importance and authority ... in this new kingdom that Jesus talked about, they had to get the hierarchy organised, and someone had to speak for him when he was away in prayer, as he often was ... they needed a PR man ... they hadn't been too successful speaking for him on some

occasions, but perhaps they had improved a little now; it would be a suitable time at this Passover for him to give out some authority ... So their thoughts wandered and intermingled, and between them they quite ignored the common courtesy of bringing water to each other to wash the dust from their feet; of perhaps they didn't quite forget, but hoped that someone else would do it, or felt that one of the younger ones should do it ... just felt tired and weary and pretended to forget.

### **Washing of the feet**

What jolt all those thoughts must have had, when Jesus rose from the table, stripped off his outer garment, tied a towel round his waist, and knelt to wash their feet. Only Peter dared to say anything, burning with shame and indignation, yet still more engrossed in himself than in the meaning of what was happening. Jesus bent to every man of those he had chosen, binding each to him in this very personal act; Judas, too, he washed.

Then he told them that this was how he saw authority, as one who serves, not as one who dominates; one who has the welfare of each and every man at heart. If they knew how to be humble, then they would also know how to rule.

### **New covenant**

At the end of the meal Jesus again took a new role with them; he celebrated the new covenant, which he said was to be in his body, given for them, and in his blood shed for them. Unless Jesus had done this, we should not have known clearly that the Cross was a death he freely accepted; and if there had been no crucifixion, his words would have remained a poetic mystery.

On the table lies what Christ calls his body and blood given for us; upon the cross that same body and blood will be broken and poured out.

Jesus is already walking in the Bitter Valley of his priesthood, a priesthood in which all sacrifice from the beginning of time is consummated; the narrowing focus of the vision of God comes to perfection as the Messianic covenant is fulfilled in him, Messiah, and Son of God.

### **Sacrifice**

From the earliest recorded history, there has been in man the desire to worship, a tendency to believe that behind the world, behind its seasons, behind good fortune and bad fortune, lay a power superior to him, a power who not only could be pleased, but also needed to be placated. Wherever there are remains of man, there too we find the signs of sacrifice, the giving of something wholly to the gods, while seeking a blessing in return on crops, fertility, travel ...

Man reached with a restless soul beyond the stars, searching, searching ... for what? For a dream? ... for a figment of his imagination, for a comforter, for a hand to hold in the dark? For a god? Yes.

It seems that man has always had a god shaped vacuum, which he has struggled and struggles to fill, and the differences of many races have brought many ways of communicating that need, and different images of God.

In many of these ancient religions there were miraculous stories, myths of strange births, the mating of the gods with mortals, and the courts of the gods where some of the blessed might walk.

The history of the world is full of men's striving after the gods, and of sacrifices and worship designed to honour them.

As physical hunger drives a man to seek for food, so the hunger for something greater and wiser than himself drove man to look for a god. In the fullness of time, all the religious striving of mankind came to fruition in Jesus, all the dreams of gods walking the earth were fulfilled in the Son of God made flesh of Mary's body; all the

long and complicated rituals for cleansing were fulfilled by God himself, who as man in perfect obedience offered the one perfect and eternal sacrifice of himself.

### **Eucharist**

Here, in the night before he suffered, Jesus, true God and true man, gives himself, his Body and his Blood; the reality of the Cross is already present, and he gives himself with his own hand, as on the next day he will give his back to the scourge, his body to the cross, his heart to the spear. Here, as he raises the unleavened bread and breaks it, and passes round the cup of the new covenant, all times are made present, and the power of his love streams backwards to the dawn of time, and forward to the end of it.

### **Betrayal and Gethsemane**

Not yet do the disciples know just what he is about; like children approaching their first communion they sense something of God in what they eat and drink but have yet to understand. And yet, and yet, there is the hand of Judas on the table, and in this very moment of exultation, the soul of Jesus cries out, already wounded by the betrayal; and Judas goes about his business.

Behind him, Jesus gathers His little flock to him and goes out, across the brook Kidron, to the garden of Gethsemane, where he used often to go, to pray and now ... to wait. Ahead within touching distance now, the lies, the betrayal, the trial, the scourging, the hammer, nails and death. In the words of Fr. Andrew SDC

He knelt beneath the olive shade  
and the trees bent over him.  
And though all life by him was made,  
his soul in twilight dim  
sought for the blessed will of God,  
until the cross shone clear for him;

then came He forth in strength again  
and went to die for sinful men.

### **Joy and pain of Jesus**

We are this day a community where the joy and pain of Jesus can be felt, as we bring with us the agonies and the joys of the world, the world loved so much that his life was given for it.

What joy is his, as he stands in every community that celebrates with him this night. Priestly hands break the bread and pour the wine, so that Christ may be recognised, worshipped and received by us.

What pain is his, as he looks on a divided world and a divided church; what pain as he sees how deep rooted still are the prejudices between one Christian and another, and between the different faiths, and between races and nations. In this night we proclaim that the healing of the world and of the hearts of men lies here; that in the heart of this man who is God, we are all embraced in love.

As the Bread and Wine are raised for us to see, so we taste in each other's hearts the final homecoming of all mankind.

### **Eternal truths**

These days that we keep are not just yearly rituals; they are doors through which we may enter in to the eternal experience of God in Jesus; not just to recall, to remember, but to make present, to call into the present being the great acts of our redemption, so that we kneel not in imagination, but in truth before the Cross. God is the God of the living, and so all time is present to him; the whole of the earthly life of Jesus is forever in God, and when we make Eucharist the whole of that life is present for us.

Tonight, we choose to be with Jesus in his last hours, and so we are made present to Him there. The night on which he said to his

friends, “Watch with me” ... and they fell asleep for sheer weariness. Tonight, as the earth turns slowly on its path around the sun, the voice of prayer will never cease, nor will the lamps go out; when there is no one left here before the Sacrament in the Garden of Repose, that watch is taken up elsewhere, as thousands upon thousands of Christians watch through the hours of Gethsemane.

In the dark hours of vigil, in the vibrant silence, and the blaze of candles, our communion with the Lord in the Bread of the Eucharist is celebrated; in these last hours we are reminded that he does all this - because we are worth it, not so much worthy, as beloved.

In the dark hours of another night, this all began when the word of God leaped down from heaven to be conceived in the womb of Mary. For nine months he lay a silent presence in her body, and the ground where she walked was blessed by the holy burden she carried.

When he made the new covenant, he chose again to be among us, silent and concealed, in bread and wine.

So let us watch with this silent Lord of ours, whether at home with our Bibles and in prayer, or in church beside the silent presence of the Sacrament; let us watch with Christ the Lord who goes the way of the Cross and tastes agony for us in his Bitter Valley.

To Calvary all roads on earth must come,  
for man doth ever injure man through sin,  
until the end of time;  
Christ's pain is manifest,  
we must not sleep if we are one with Him ...

*In sacrifice and offerings you take no pleasure; burnt offerings and sin offerings you have not required..and so I said “Behold I come..”*

*In the depths of our isolation, we cry to you Lord God; give light to our darkness and bring us out of the prison of our despair; through Jesus Christ your Son.*

*Set free your people in Ukraine.*

### **6A THE WAY OF THE CROSS** GOOD FRIDAY

#### **The Cross**

The way of Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross. Jesus, who now reaches his last conscious resting place upon the wood of the Cross, comes to the end of his journey.

From birth to death he has walked in obedience to the Father, and now he is himself the lamb of sacrifice, and as he accepts the cross at our hands, we ourselves stand beneath it and look up. Without the cross there would be no Easter, without the sacrifice, no feast, without the pain, no joy, without the crucifixion, no glory.

#### **Acts**

Only six days ago, he came into the courts of the Lord, to the sound of wild welcome and cheers, hardly a man but wished him well; the city was in tumult and his name on every tongue; he followed that by cleansing the temple, sweeping through its courts with the fire of the living God, driving out all the counterfeit dealers; then he had sat and taught the ordinary people how to please God without being trapped in the two faced ways of their religious leaders.

It had seemed as though the world was at his feet when he took a day's rest with his friends at Bethany. Yet all the time the birds of prey were gathering in secret; and each day he knew what was in the hearts of men, how little they were to be trusted; he knew that he was walking slowly but surely to a Cross.

#### **Last Supper**

Last night we watched and prayed with him. It is only 12 hours since he began this last earthly day; 16 hours since he celebrated the Pasch, with such love and such pain with the disciples, the joy

of this close and intimate meal shadowed by coming betrayal, desertion, and the cross itself.

To the end he was our courteous Lord, as he took up the towel, and washed the tired feet of his friends. He gave the Bread and the Cup and shared his very life, so soon to be yielded up for them, and for us. He gave Judas a special sign of love, as though he might change his purpose; the mind of love was open to the mind of sin, but found no answer there, and Judas went his way. He had led them then to Gethsemane, through those long hours had wrestled in fearful agony. Jesus, true God, within the capacity of a man's mind, flinched before the choice.

### **Garden**

The poet sees behind the charcoal sketch...

“Ah, must Designer infinite,

Ah must thou char the wood e'er thou canst limn with it?”

If Satan in those early temptations, tried him so hard and so openly, how much more cunningly would he approach him in these last hours, speaking words of wisdom and prudence against the waste and agony of death; how great must have been the human shrinking from betrayal, abandon, physical torture and death.

Have you loved and been betrayed; given and been spurned; struggled and been crushed; fallen and been trodden upon; despaired in a sea of darkness; felt your nerves flex to explosion; poured out your tears to no avail?

Have you cried out to God at the waste and futile pain of dying child and leprous body? Have you wept before the full and sleek, the tight and the mean?

Jesus this day was there before you, bearing the world's sorrows; long ago, now it seems, he said “I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straightened until it be accomplished.”

Now that baptism is here, and his sweat falls like great drops of blood in facing it. Is there no other way, no other path, save this fear, this crushing load, this failure, this scorn, this hunger, this death?

This is the way, this is the bitter valley that he must cross; yet even as he sets his feet upon the last stages of the way of the cross, it becomes a place of springs, a source of life, reaching from the dawn to the end of time. Here now, as we stand beneath the Cross, we see that we cannot shape him to our will. He is not a tool for us to use in politics or war; He is the way, the truth and the life. We must struggle, not to mould his body to our cross, but to walk ourselves in freedom in the way of the cross.

### **Face of pain**

Look on the face so marked with pain, and the body torn with whips and nails; look well, for here is not a key to all our problems, but the principle by which we are to live. Unless we have looked long and hard, and have printed his face upon our minds, and his sufferings in our hearts, we will not be strong enough to serve those who like him are crushed and thrust aside.

### **Betrayal in the Garden**

Jesus is betrayed at dead of night, as the night wind breathes through the light olive leaves; one friend betrays him, and the others, who were prepared to fight are not prepared to suffer, and like shadows they are gone, leaving only Jesus, ... and the guards. Perhaps they may have had some disquiet on their way to execute this duty; some may have been acting against their consciences, saving their jobs, rather than standing for the truth; some may have feared some sort of magic power from gossip they heard; some might have had a desire to defend the temple ... All were startled by what they saw and heard, momentarily frightened by the words ... "I am he ... let these others go." Did "I AM" the name of Yahweh, on the lips of a man bring fear into their hearts?

## **Trial**

If so, it was only momentary, however, and it was soon followed by the travesty of a trial, with the Sanhedrin called out from their beds in the middle of the night - all for the purpose of condemning this man. All the plotting of men to condemn the innocent, and frustrate justice, is here, shown in awful clarity as they struggle to find at least two false witnesses.

In the end, the High Priest felt safe enough to challenge Jesus to declare himself; Caiaphas by now knew his man, and was sure that he would get from Jesus enough to condemn him for blasphemy. What bitter dramatic irony is here, as the Christ, the living God made flesh stands at the bar of the temple of the living God, condemned already except for the formalities, his only protection the living truth which he is himself.

## **Pilate and Herod**

From here, from the rejection and mockery of his own, to the court of the world, the court of Pilate; he too is brought from his bed to hear this case and enjoy the humiliation of the priests. They must beg Roman permission and authority to carry out the death sentence that Jewish law required for blasphemy such as Jesus had uttered. This was not a trumped-up charge; I remember hearing a commentary on a TV programme, which said that of course though Jesus might have been a very holy man, he could never have believed himself to be the Son of God ... this would have been total blasphemy for a Jew. That was why Caiaphas forced the statement from Jesus' own mouth. Now he becomes a political ball, passing between the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor, and then between the governor and Herod, the puppet ruler of Judea; indeed, an old enmity was set aside and Pilate and Herod made friends over this victim of temple justice.

## **Peter**

Jesus has been pushed and propelled from one to the other; in his heart is still the sound of the crowing of the cock, and Peter's face ... in the shadows of the High priest's court; he bears a grief for Peter, and for all of us who like him, in sudden danger or pressure, betray our trust, forget all our fine words, and save our skins for another day.

## **Pilate outwitted**

He comes to the final rejection by the people; Pilate has been outwitted by the priests, and they have caught him with a smooth but potent threat.

Pilate is faced with an inescapable decision; he clearly sees the malice, the desire to do this man to death in their faces and voices; he does not understand the fear they have of Jesus. He believes Jesus to be an innocent man, perhaps a fool, even a visionary, at all events the butt of their hatred. He does not know these men as well as they know him, and so he has Jesus scourged, thinking to satisfy their lust for vengeance, which he perceived but did not understand ... After all, he himself was not a Jew, nor needed to know the ins and outs of their theology, except when it affected security; and there they had him, trapped.

He brought Jesus out before the people, weakened by the terrible scourging, and thought to have him released by pity of the crowds, many of whom after all thought they had witnessed healing powers, or been healed by this strange itinerant preacher.

“Behold the man!” he said, “crucify ,crucify” they cry. “Why, what evil has he done?” says Pilate, astounded by the venom of the crowd. “Crucify, crucify him, give us Barabbas.” they cry.

Pilate as he looks among the crowd sees the headdresses of the priests everywhere, leading and stirring. In anger and frustration, he cries out “Shall I crucify your King?”

Now Rome does battle with Judaea for justice and Judaea and the scheming priests shall pay a price; back comes the submission ..." We have no king but Caesar."

Pilate has no time to think further; he is near to having a riot on his hands, and if he failed to act decisively, he would lose control. He could have said "I rule for Rome, and Rome rules with justice everywhere; I will not connive at this man's murder ..." But Rome also expected her rulers to achieve peace, and to keep control.

This was only one man after all ... an obstinate man who would not open his mouth to defend himself; it was not like the crucifixion of the 6,000 at the time of Spartacus.

He would have to let them have their way.

So, calling for water, he washed his hands of it all; that loaded phrase passes today between men who have no knowledge of that first washing of hands, in front of a howling mob, who finally cried "His blood be on us and on our children."

How often in the years since have Christians used that cry as an excuse to persecute the Jews - how often have we the children of the new covenant condemned and despised the chosen race of the old covenant, honoured with the birth of the Saviour of the world. As though the death of Jesus was the responsibility alone of that foolish and fickle crowd, that one day hailed him as king, and another shouted for his blood. We have all brought Jesus to his cross, he receives it at our hands; and by his steadfast walking through the bitter valley of the cross, he brings us life, and makes all suffering, through his own, a place of springs where death is overcome by life.

### **Way to the cross**

He endures the final mockery, the twisted thorns forced upon his head and brow, and the purple robe thrown around him together

with sarcastic homage; cruel laughter, as as he sways in weakness, his mind and body torn; and so, then, they lead him out.

It is only in the last 100 years that executions have ceased to be a public example and a public entertainment. People turned out in curiosity, drawn by the fascination of seeing a life cut short, hoping for a spectacle, eager to see how a man would die, looking for a bit of gruesome fun, assuming that they would always be the audience, never the actor.

At crucifixions, the watching crowds would expect a bit of spirit from the condemned; the men themselves might well take their minds off what was coming by a cut and thrust banter of bawdy jokes and defiance, keeping it up to the end, resigned to their ill luck in getting caught. Even so later, one thief would curse and swear, taunting Jesus with what he had heard about his powers.

### **Jesus**

But as Jesus made his way to the cross, it was different. Here was a man, still walking after a scourging that often killed the victim; men have died in our history under the cat o' nine tails, if not from the wounds, then from the terrible shock to the heart. Jesus still walked on, carrying the cross bar. It didn't seem quite so bad to nail down the shouting abusive ones, the anger helped; but to nail one down like this fellow, it made men think.

### **Veronica**

The sweat and blood ran down his face, and made it difficult to see where to put his feet, and out of the crowd, before the guards could see what was happening, a woman ran, and with a merciful quick touch wiped the face of Jesus, and then she was gone again, never to forget the face she had looked upon in that instant, and whose pain she had eased; gone, but not forgotten as we remember down the ages - Veronica and her loving pity.

Somewhere along the way too, stood Mary the mother, in her last loyalty and faith in him, who was both child of her flesh, and Saviour of her soul.

Long years ago, her own mother had trusted her through the mysterious conception and birth of her son; now she as mother gave to him that same trust. There was no conflict in the meeting of their eyes, but perfect agony of love.

### **Crucifixion**

At last the work is done; the soldiers set his body on the wood, and hands and feet are pierced with the skill of many crucifixions; the cross is raised and jolted into place ... and faint but clear the soldiers hear the words "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." they shrug and turn to their dice.

Now is the covenant in cup and bread ratified, and we approach him here and ever, in that sacramental presence; we come to him as on a journey, and our feet stand in many places. In the fields with the shepherds long ago; in the Egyptian desert where the great sphinx watched Joseph bring his family down into the land of the Nile; among the shavings in the carpenter's workshop at Nazareth; among the five thousand fed on the mountainside; in the Upper room at that Passover meal; and finally here, beneath the Cross, on which the Saviour of the world is hung, beneath the Cross that seems to reach from earth to heaven.

The eyes of compassion are closed by sweat and blood, the hands and feet are wrenched by nails, to support a broken body; there is a wartime smell of death, the cursing of the soldiers, a terrible sound of crying, and there is coming a darkness on the land.

Jesus, nailed to the hard wood  
mine the will that drove thee there;  
Jesus stripped in the sight of men,  
mine the will that shamed thee so;  
Jesus, suffering the mocking jest, the bitter scorn,  
mine the thought that caused thee pain;  
Jesus, forgiving those who knew what they did;  
I knew, and yet I wronged thee all the more.  
Break thou our hearts to fill us full of love,  
For all the world must come to Calvary.

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord ...?*

*For all who suffer and are afflicted, for the hungry and  
homeless, the destitute and oppressed; for the sick, the wounded  
and the crippled; for those tempted to despair, for the sorrowful  
and bereaved, for prisoners and captives and those in mortal  
danger, and all who open their hearts and homes to the needy,  
especially at this time from our family in Ukraine.*

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## **6B THE WAY OF THE CROSS**

Jesus, by thy wounded hands, O keep my hands from wrong;  
Jesus, by thy parched lips, O curb my cruel tongue;  
Jesus, by thy wounded feet, O lead my path to thee;  
Jesus, by thy wounded side, O turn my heart to thee;  
Jesus, by thy body torn, O bind my will to thee;  
Jesus, by thy dying breath, O lift my soul to thee;  
Jesus, by thy silent tomb, O purge all sin from me;  
Jesus, by thy hope of dawn, O bring all men to thee.

### **The sign**

Long ago, there was a sign in the heavens, that came and went; a star, studied and followed by wise and learned, even maybe rich and learned men. They followed it to their journey's end, where all their wisdom and knowledge was rewarded with a sign of poverty, simplicity and humility. There is set in the heavens now, not a star, but a cross; it is our guide, our strength, a place of springs, where death is overcome by life. Yet it is in the dying, that death is overcome, by the final outpouring of life to the last breath, that the power of sin and death is broken. Here is the Lamb, not one, as of many lambs used in the temple offerings; here is the one perfect lamb of God, the one final and unblemished and sufficient sacrifice; free from all taint of sin, yet bearing the sin of all for time past and all time to come. In the last supper, he had said, "This is my body, given for you ... this is my blood shed for you" and the real giving of the body and blood made present at that meal is now shown for us to see and understand, as best we may.

### **Time and eternity**

When at the end of the Liturgy, priest and servers go to the altar where Christ in his sacramental Presence awaits our last acts, the key will be turned, the door opened, and there will be the

sacrament revealed. When we make Eucharist together, it is as though the sacrament itself is a spiritual door that opens on eternity, and we behold all the saving acts of our redemption.

We are not turning pages of much-loved photographs of precious memory, we are entering the dimensions of eternity, where time is always present. So it is, that entering by this door, through the sacramental presence of Christ, we stand with thoughts and words that turn to dust before the Cross on which the Saviour of the world is hung.

### **Soldiers**

Let us look at those with whom we stand. The execution guard are no different from those of any day of crucifixion; this is a duty that they all do in turn. Constant repetition dulls their feelings, and they are men who will have seen rough duty elsewhere; and in those days a soldier fought face to face with his enemy and delivered death with his own hand. Nevertheless, they must mostly have been glad when that tour of duty was over. They were entitled to anything the prisoners had – the most they would have got from these three men was the seamless robe of the quiet one, the one that made them feel a bit brutal. It was easier to do this job if you could get a bit worked up, maybe struggle to hold a man down; but this one, well, he said nothing

He seemed to be trying to make it easier for them in some strange way – surely never a man took it like this one; and the way he hung there, hardly a word except to a couple of his friends, one his mother, it seems, poor woman. They shook the dice and kept an eye on the gathering clouds, it was getting really dark.

### **Bystanders**

A little below the hill there was a moving stream of people, coming and going; some stood and stared, then went away weeping; friends of his that were strangely silent earlier in the scene before Pilate;

some looked and waited for some great sign; even if they had managed to crucify him, he would surely come off the cross before too late; After all, he had raised Lazarus from the dead; others looked sadly, thinking that he could not do for himself what he had done for others. Some would be on their way, in or out of the city, and would not normally notice the bodies hanging there, it was a common sight; but on this day, the eve of Passover, the sky was dark and stormy, and they had heard that the carpenter of Nazareth had been crucified . . . so they stayed awhile - such a waste of a young life; but these were dark and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

### **The thieves**

One of the men with Jesus was defiant to the end, with the wild recklessness of a man who knows the worst has happened already; he was crucified for sedition and murder, and sedition was the accusation that the men of the temple had hoped to fasten on Jesus.

This man had not much time for the quiet way of Jesus; the only thing that interested him was whether Jesus could use his powers to get them off the cross, and that was a sarcastic throwaway line; they were finished anyway.

But the other was amazed by Jesus; if anyone had reason to protest, he had, and yet he took it all as though it was part of him; and so the second thief felt impelled to take the edge off the other man's sarcasm, and acknowledged Jesus.

“Remember me” he said “when you come into your kingdom.”

It may have been an act of faith, it may have been the memory of things he had heard about this man; it may have been a kindness, like a cup of cold water to a stranger. The reason, whatever it was vanished, for he looked across with great difficulty, and his eyes were caught and held by the eyes of Jesus, and in them the thief

found his own homecoming, as the Lord of life held his gaze, and said “Today, you shall be with me in paradise.”

### **Magdalene**

Near the foot of the cross, touching the wood and keening in a silent agony is the Magdalene; perhaps the legend is true, that she had been able to make a way for herself and Mary the mother and John, because she knew the soldiers from other times when she was well known for her beauty ... and courtesan skills; perhaps they made her give them a song or a dance for old times sake, before they let them through ... if so it must have been the performance of her life; and now her lovely hair streamed down her grieving back as she waited for the end. It was the open hearted sinner that found the place of honour at the foot of the cross, near to the mother of Jesus; there was no Peter to show repentant pride; no Judas to reveal repentant treachery; no Nicodemus repenting in the fullness of wisdom ... only Mary, a repentant woman.

### **John**

John was there, John who had been so close in understanding to Jesus; John who had stood and watched in the High Priest's house when they had tried to trap Jesus. He was the only one of the three privileged disciples to be there, to finally keep him company as he crossed the bitter valley.

Perhaps he had known that Mary the mother must be there and came to be with her as she watched her Son's last agony. He was there to receive her as a charge from Jesus, to be to him, and thus to us, like a mother, and he to her a son.

### **Mary**

She too endured the cross; she knew the bitterness of that “still fastening ... she knew, her heart transfixed beside the cross” the myrrh of Bethlehem was soon to be used on the body of the young

King of glory. Shall not every mother look on Mary, and every son and daughter look on her with John.

### **Ourselves**

So, now where do we stand amidst this company, as this new covenant is ratified by Jesus; where do we stand? His footsteps lead us to his bitter valley, and in each step, we find a place of springs; the griefs and sorrows of our many lives are sown with his dying, to be the seed of life. But we must look, nor turn our heads away behind the wooden carving and the gilded cross; we must hear the crowds, and breathe the heat, hear the cursing and banter of the soldiers, sense the sour ugliness of a place of crucifixion, there is a wartime smell of death; see the sweat and blood closing the eyes of God upon the cross, sense the aching cramp of twisted arms and legs, and the fearful thirst.

Then only can we recognise in all our living the extension of his joy and sorrow; then shall we know that it is not enough to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; we must also show to them the Bread of Heaven. We must show how God in his sacrament can restore a man's dignity, strengthen the weary, and comfort the bereaved. Then shall our buildings be indeed a sanctuary, where the weak and weary and grieving can put down their heavy loads, and shed their tears, and pour out their hearts in peace.

From there they will return with a new dignity, for they have seen in the face of the crucified Lord a love that touches all their lives. In the midst of their troubles they have found a place of springs.

O Lord Christ, Lamb of God, Lord of lords  
Call us who are called to be saints  
along the way of the Cross.  
Draw us, who would draw nearer to our king  
to the foot of the cross.

Instruct us the ignorant and blind  
in the school of the cross;  
Arm us for the battles of holiness  
by the sight of the cross;  
And seal us in the kingdom of your glory  
Among the servants of your cross;  
O crucified Lord, who lives and reigns  
one God Almighty, eternal world  
without end.

*Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*The Lord himself has known this desolation.*

*Lord, we pray you to set your passion, cross and death between  
your judgement and our souls; now and in the hour of our  
death, and may your mercy rest on all our family in Ukraine and  
all affected by this tragic time.*

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## 6C THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Almighty everlasting God, who hast reared from earth unto heaven a mighty Tree, standing forever, whereon before the face of men hangeth a Man, stretched and nailed, rejected and dying and alone; O thou that art true and showest only truth, grant us to fear not to suffer with him, die with him, and be buried with him, that we may also be made alive with him and glorified together in the heavenly places.

Jesus, who so long since set his face steadfastly towards the holy city, is reaching the climax of his journey.

“Love reigns, lifted above the world of men, darkness above, the trembling earth beneath.

'I thirst ' Love cries, and all the world is thirsting in that cry;

'I thirst for love' love cries.

'Give me your love, that you may share my thirst.’”

At last, the thirst is quenched, the sponge upon a spear has touched his lips and freed his voice for one last word .... “It is finished.”

The angel of death, who passed over the all the first born of Israel in so long ago in Egypt, has rested now upon the Son of God, Israel's first born for all time, and he who is the source of life himself has died upon the tree.

The storm has shaken the city, and alarmed the passers by, and the centurion is left amazed and wondering, as they continue their duty, waiting for the others to die. It is near to the feast, and the priests want to get everything finished and cleared away, so they ask for the legs of the men to be broken.

However, when they come to Jesus, they see that he is dead already; one of the soldiers takes a spear and thrusts it into his side.

The tradition handed down by John and recorded in his gospel, says that there came blood and water out of the side of Christ, blood the sign of life, and water the greatest need of life. Here is the final place of springs, springs of life rising out of the dark stillness of death.

Between this moment and the dawn of Easter is the silence of the grave. We mark that in our churches by the absence of the sacramental presence in our midst. We have an empty church, stripped of all beauty; so many places were made beautiful or bearable by the presence of Jesus; so much healing of body, mind and soul, and the very ground where he laid his head is holy, touched with light; now even the place where customarily he lays his Body and Blood is empty. The altar is bare, the candles are gone, the lights are out, and the door swings open on the empty sacramental home of Jesus.

Now must we wait, for we are at that hour when all creation hushed to see the Lord of all laid in a tomb. Waiting, waiting, as the dark earth waits for the grain to rise within it.

### **Disciples**

Waiting like the disciples, for what? It seemed that they remembered nothing of his teaching. St. Luke tells us how he warned them ... “The son of man ... will be given over to the unbelievers, and will be mocked and maltreated and spat upon, and when they have scourged him, they will put him to death, and on the third day he will rise again.” Yet ... who are we, knowing all our sins and foolishness, to think that we should have had a clearer vision or been more faithful, had we lived and walked with him? They loved and failed the test that came upon them, but as for us, with all the witness and knowledge of two thousand years, often we do not see that if we think we do not fail, it is because we do not love with all our hearts.

The love rising in us is like a wavering candle, not strong enough to be tested and blown upon, trembling in the gusts of scorn and fearful of the shadows of death.

### **Mary Magdalene**

Waiting like Mary Magdalene, grieving for the love that freed from her old life, for the gentle hand, and the feet she had kissed and washed with her tears. She had no reputation to lose, she who had known both human love and human lust. The tears of lost times, lost people, lost lives and finally a lost Lord, coursed endlessly down her face.

### **Mary the Mother**

Waiting like Mary the mother, who had watched and pondered all her life upon her son, so wonderfully conceived, so fine in his growing, so obedient in his youth, but always walking the same road of the vision of God.

Yea, oft hath a mother bent her head,  
    over her sleeping child,  
And her soul hath sung magnificat  
    for in her had been fulfilled  
all the needs of the life that came from her  
    when her baby woke and wanted her  
and met her gaze and smiled.

But the child that Mary looked upon  
    is His whole creation's food  
And the needs of nations flock to him  
    Who alone hath understood?  
by his own straw and twisted thorn  
    By his gallows tree and robe of scorn  
Each soul and its sweat of blood.

Had she not some time between Jerusalem and Nazareth passed beneath the shadow of the crosses of execution, and had that shadow not brought a touch of winter to her heart? Mary, who stood and watched his dying agony, unable even to shield from the heat and flies the one whom once she had protected in his childhood. In her still figure stands a peace that under girds all agony.

“He knows; therefore I trust the sword that pierces through my soul; he is not less my child within the tomb, nor less my God than he proclaimed himself to be.”

### **John**

Waiting like John; the young son of thunder Jesus named him; he who wanted to call down thunder and fire on the village that would not receive Jesus; John the beloved, who stirred no thoughts of jealousy in any heart, who leaned on Jesus' heart at the last supper in easy friendship; John, who was young, impetuous, lacking in experience, yet so full of vision that he alone of the Twelve stood by the cross; John whose youth was suddenly harshly matured in agony for the Lord; John to whom Jesus gave his mother, his last treasure and bequest.

We wait for the sounds that break the pattern of the night, the light that slowly rises over Golgotha. An outline of three crosses against the rising sun, a quickening of the morning air, the hasty steps of the women with spices, a sense that life has just begun.

They saw young men like angels, and fled, εφοβοῦντο γάρ, they were afraid. Peter and John rushed to the grave and saw the grave clothes lying unmoved untouched. But it would be Mary Magdalene, the most forgiven and the most loving, who would see him through her tears.

Come dear heart,  
the fields are white to harvest, come and see  
As in a glass the timeless mystery  
of love, whereby we feed  
on God, our bread indeed.  
Torn by the sickles see him share the smart  
Of travailing creation, maimed, despised  
yet by his lovers the more dearly prized.  
Because for us he lay his beauty low  
Last toll paid by perfection for our loss!  
Trace on these fields his everlasting Cross  
And o'er the stricken sheaves the Immortal victim's crown.  
From far horizons came a voice that said  
“Lo! from the hand of death take thou thy daily bread”  
then I awaking saw  
A splendour in the heart of things.  
The flame of living love which lights the law  
of mystic death that works the mystic birth.  
I know the patient passion of the earth  
maternal, everlasting, whence there springs  
The Bread of Angels and the life of man.  
Now in each blade  
I, blind no longer, see  
The glory of God's growth; know it to be  
an earnest of the Immemorial Plan.  
Yes, I have understood  
how all things are one great oblation made.

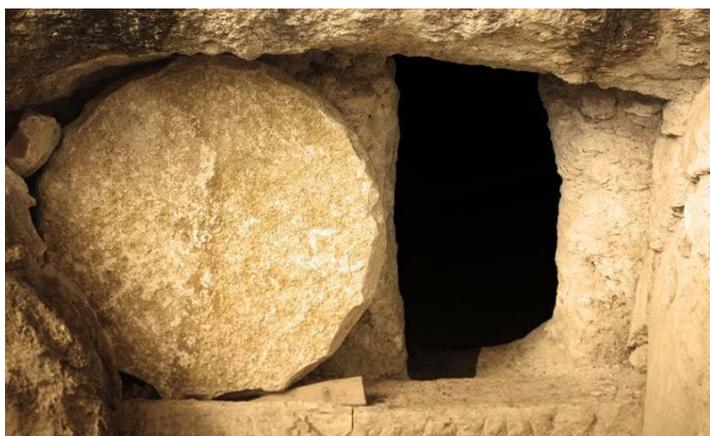
He on our altars, we on this world's rood.  
Even as this corn  
Earthborn  
Reaped, ground to grist,  
Crushed and tormented in the mills of God,  
And offered at Life's hands, a living Eucharist.

*Were you there when they laid in the tomb?*

*They cried out to you, and you heard them; they trusted in you  
and were not put to shame.*

*Lord God, whose blessed Son gave his back to the smiters and  
did not hide his face from shame; give us the grace to embrace  
the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the  
glory that shall be revealed.*

*May our brothers and sisters in Ukraine find their rest in you  
and in your pity and love, send comforters to their children.*





Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many years has lain;  
love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

In the grave they laid him, love whom men had slain,  
thinking that never he would wake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,  
he that for three days in the grave had lain;  
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:  
love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

When our hearts are wintry grieving, or in pain,  
thy touch can call us back to life again;  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872-1958)



## **Noli Me Tangere**

The significance and importance of touch has been highlighted during the last two years; so much is expressed by touch that many of us have ignored until now; the sense of trust, reassurance, presence, joy. shared moments recalled; relationships renewed and strengthened ... and how we have missed it.

What an instinctive reaction, for Mary, the disciples in their bewildered and grieving state.. Thomas, “I shall not believe until I put my fingers into his hands...”our first instinct would be to embrace. Yet Jesus says to Mary ... “Don’t cling to me.” Her heart was already responding, but there had to be a change. For the disciples too there had to be a change. Jesus, who had been their daily companion, with whom they travelled ,ate and drank was alive. The touch of His presence was essential so that they could truly believe, He met with them, ate with them, walked with them, invited Thomas to put his fingers into His hands; how many times He met with them apart from those recorded we do not know, though John says that if all was recorded, the world could not contain the books that should be written. These are recorded so that we may believe.

The touch and reassurance was there, but from now on that touch would be in the hearts of men and women. He shared a meal with the two at Emmaus, He lit a fire and cooked breakfast for them on the seashore after a long night’s fishing; these touches of love, and forgiveness, renewed them and from now on the meal He would share would be the Eucharist; and their relationship became such that at His Ascension they were not downcast but rejoiced in their return to Jerusalem ... From now on they would know He was with them; they would know Him in the breaking of bread, ... so that we too might know Him. Everything lay ahead, and though we hungered for the Body of Christ over these months, we too know His presence and look forward in that strength....to the Bread



We are free to worship or not at this time; our brothers and sisters in Ukraine are not, trapped in the war in their land; as we reflect on the great love of Jesus in His Passion, let us hold them up in love and shame that our human family should again see such horrors and brutality, and offer ourselves again to the God whose heart broke on the cross for us all.

These reflections were written by the tomb of Richard of Chichester in 1984; used for St. Peter's and St Paul's Bedford; for the parish of Leighton Buzzard in 2009, and for Great Brickhill sometime later, and recorded on Youtube in Lent 2021.

They are published unexpectedly as a tribute to the people of Ukraine who are walking such a bitter valley, and in tribute to their courage. God bless Ukraine.

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