

Homily for Palm Sunday 25th March 2018 – Priory Church of Our Lady & S. Cuthbert, Worksop

In the Name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This morning we in the company of the faithful throughout the world, have begun our journey into Holy Week. The drama of the Palm Liturgy and the reading of the Passion unfolds as we re-enact that very first entry into Jerusalem by our Lord, for Palm Sunday is a reminder of what took place all those centuries before and for a brief moment we share in that Triumph of Jesus entering the city. Men, women and children turned out to get a glimpse of this man called Jesus approaching their metropolis. To them he is a celebrity figure, the talk of the town, this man who it was said could perform miracles, even raise the dead! These people, as an act of homage threw palm branches in his path, and hailed him as Messiah, the one who had come to redeem the world, arriving not on foot, but on a colt.

Holy Week for us is a journey which traces the path of Jesus to Bethany, Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, and finally Golgotha, the site of His Crucifixion. Each one of these journeys is a major event in itself. Each new path taken seems to draw us deeper in the darkness. Death and burial beckon us. Holy Week and all that it entails will only reinforce this reality. Perhaps that is why many of us avoid Holy Week. Let's face it---we all like happy endings and celebrations so why not skip the pain and the awful bits and get on with the joy! Well, it doesn't quite work out that way. If we are not prepared to renounce ourselves, to suffer with Jesus in his sufferings, his temptations, then the Resurrection mystery for us becomes meaningless. Without Holy Week, indeed, without the Crucifixion, there is no Resurrection.

All through this week we find people drawn to Jesus, who then resist him, or try to change the story, avoiding the consequences or denounce him. The crowds that cheered him will later cry "Crucify!" Religious folk plotted his death. They just didn't like the way the story was working out. They feared reality. S. Peter denied Him. After all he was important. He couldn't risk arrest. He was now in charge. In the end only Simon of Cyrene was prepared to be faithful and carry the cross. Only the faithful and brave women and S. John stood and watched the reality of the barbaric execution. Only S. Joseph of Arimathea was brave enough to offer a tomb. Each of these journeys draws us into a world of darkness, of betrayal, of naked power, of cowardice and of death. We find ourselves uncomfortable and offended by this day and the days that are now before us, but our faith is not an escape from reality. Our faith draws us into the reality of this world as Jesus, who is one of us, and Jesus who is true God, confronts and submits to the worst human beings do in order to give us the grace to be the best human beings we can be. Jesus dies. He dies an agonising and dreadful death. In that agony Jesus dies to all the acts of betrayal, false ambition, power, authority, evil and corruption that lies within the human race and within each one of us.

For two days we will be left with a dead Jesus in the tomb. There's no gladness or pleasure in the readings for today, nor will there be all week. Unless we are prepared to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, leaving our comfort-zone, our self-satisfaction, daring to walk beyond safety into the darkness of evil and death, waiting upon Jesus shrouded inside the Sepulchre, we will not even begin to grasp the power of the Resurrection and enter into the true Joy of the Risen Lord. Amen.

Maundy Thursday 29th March 2018 Priory Church of Our Lady and S. Cuthbert, Worksop, Notts

The Epistle: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

The Gospel: S. John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Tonight marks a turning point in the life of Our Lord. Tonight we meet as God's holy people for the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, his institution of the Holy Eucharist with his disciples. For this *is* the night that Jesus is betrayed. Tonight is the eve of His Crucifixion on Calvary. By tomorrow he would be executed, along with two criminals. In tonight's Gospel, Jesus shows his unconditional love for the disciples by performing a very simple act of service: He washes their feet. Jesus, the Servant of God, humbled Himself before His disciples for He loved them so much that he lived and was now prepared to die for them. It was for the service of others that led him on to Calvary. It was for this that Jesus gave us a new commandment, that we love one another.

This gesture of love on the part of Jesus showed how much Our Lord cared for His disciples. He called them his friends, and yet one of them betrayed him in the end. Jesus gave us a commandment that we love one another, but sometimes it is difficult to live the true faith and to believe in the love of God when all around us is pain and distress and in our own selves a great darkness. It is hard to love others if they are betraying and deceiving us. Nevertheless, this is what Our Lord commanded and taught us: that we should love God and one another. In Jesus we see the perfect example of both these loves. We see a man, born of a woman, loving God in the midst of agony and darkness, loving God to the end. He taught us two things: to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. We are to love those who hate us, reject us, who persecute us. If we love ourselves and hate others, we therefore must hate God. For God is the God of love and compassion, not hate: *"Love one another, as I have loved you."*

In spite of all the torments, the spitting, the accusations, the deceptions, the temptations, the physical abuse----Jesus never once stopped loving those who treated him with malice and shame. Tonight we share in the Lord's Eucharist, the feast of Passover and unleavened bread. The words of Institution have been the same through the ages. The cup of wine is drunk. Both actions are blessed by God. The solemn moment arrives when Jesus proclaims: *"Do this in remembrance of me."* Jesus offers Himself as a true and living sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

In a few moments after the foot-washing, the altar will be set for us, even though we are unworthy to participate in this offering of His Blessed Body and Blood, Jesus invites us to come and share in His banquet, the Bread of Life and the Cup of Everlasting Salvation. By Christ's sacrifice offered for us in the Mass, we remember Him and recall what He did for us. The night that fixed His death is the night which provides for the future. *"Do this in remembrance of me"*----those words are a time-less reminder of our Lord when we participate in His offering of Himself for the sins of the whole world. His body broken for us, His blood shed for us. *"Do this in remembrance of me"*. These were the words of Jesus spoken to his disciples as they gathered in the Upper Room *"When I am no longer with you, offer this bread and wine to remember me"*.

The last meal of material fellowship is laid on for us is the feast of spiritual food. Jesus gives His own life to us in the Blessed Sacrament, which makes us as much with Him as branches are on the vine. As we feed upon Him, taking into our life His life, so we learn to love as He loved. The Love of God and the love of our neighbour----that is Jesus' commandment to us. We must never forget this for if we suffer rejection and hostility from others because of our belief or who we are, we have a sure and certain hope that Christ will always love us and never reject us.

He loved us so much that he was prepared to die Himself so that we might have eternal life----free from sin, free from pain, free from the assaults of this world. That is Jesus' gift to us. That is the Father's gift to us, His Son who bore the sins of all. *"Do this in remembrance of me."*

Christ on the Cross, loving to the end, that is our example, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament given to us here at the altar, the place of sacrifice---that is our food and drink, the power by which we are able to follow His example. Amen.

The Gospel: S. John 18:1-19, 42

In our Community Church at Mirfield, there is a bronze Crucifix, moulded by the Serbian sculptor, Ivan Mestrovich. It depicts Our Blessed Lord in the moment of desolation, just before His death. Some people when they see it turn away with an expression of disgust. For one thing: the Oriental cast of feature alienates them, though it reminds them how wholly the Son of God identified Himself with us, taking upon Himself not human nature in the abstract, but human nature, like our own, of a particular age and particular race. Then the agony of body and mind in the Figure is so repellently obtrusive. The limbs seem strained to breaking point, the joints stand out, the hands stick up straight with a ghastly helplessness, and the head is sunk on the left, the skin drawn tight over the cheek bones. The lips are parted in pain, and the eyes closing in death. Every line accentuates the torture, and there is a flatness about it that tells of utter collapse. But no trace of weakness shows itself, none of that unimaginative sentimentalism seen in some modern German and French prints. They physical powers have given out, but the soul holds on its way undaunted. Our first instinct is to put away the Crucifix: it shocks and revolts our preconceived ideas of the Passion, its piteous intensity hurts us. But then we remember the words of scripture: *“Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes, a thing despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces, he was despised and we took no account of him.”*

But seeing Christ in this tormented way brings us home to the reality of pain, torture and death. On this Good Friday we see the humanity of Jesus as He really is. Jesus died on the Cross today. He died for your sins and mine. During these past six weeks you and I have walked the way of the Cross, meditating on those very events which led up to today. At the 12th Station, Jesus dies on the Cross----what is going through our minds at that moment? Do we stop and think of those who have gone before us? Do we grieve for our Lord as we do our own family and friends? In order for us to grasp the reality, we must not imagine Jesus on the Cross as a clean-shaven, well-groomed and white washed figure. No, we must gaze upon the blood soaked hair and face of Jesus, we must gaze on the wounds of torture he endured. It isn't a pretty sight but that is what it was----a gruesome sight showing how evil and cruel the world can become.

This graphic and physical side of suffering brings home to us more clearly what our Saviour bore for our sins. Because you and I are standing with His Mother Mary by the Cross, you and I are suffering with her Son as she is and by giving ourselves to Him knowing that if we die with Him we shall also live with Him. We venerate Him on the wood of the Cross, and pray in its shadow for the needs of the world He has come to redeem and for our own. This Cross is our banner of Hope. Through the Cross we see the Tree of Life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Gospel: S. Mark 16:1-7

On this most solemn festival of the Christian Year, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead provides us with hope and love. Tonight, the new fire has been struck, no longer do we live in the darkness of sin and death, for Christ has won for us the victory.

The first Easter was an incredible day, one that started with disbelief, with fear and trembling and bewilderment beside the empty tomb, and ended with astonishment, excitement and thanksgiving. Despite all the disciples had seen Jesus do, from healing the sick to calming the storms, and despite all that they had heard Jesus say about how he would be killed and on the third day be raised, not one of them expected---after the cross was raised, not one of them hoped---after he was laid in the grave, to ever see Jesus again. No one stood watch near the tomb, no one waited to see if he would rise. When Jesus died their hopes died, their convictions died, indeed their faith died and they huddled in the Upper Room where they had celebrated the Passover hiding in there in fear that the authorities would treat them just as they had treated Jesus.

What is striking about the first Easter Day is that the Resurrection is first discovered---not by Peter upon whom the Church is founded, but by three women---and these women do not go to the tomb to see if their Lord is risen, but rather they go to finish the job of burying him. But once they enter they see a man dressed in white who tells them that Jesus whom they are looking for, was crucified and has risen, he's no longer in the tomb, see for yourself where he was laid. The women are told to go and inform the disciples and Peter that Jesus will see them in Galilee. But the women had fled trembling in fear but at the same time astonished at what they heard and yet they were afraid and said nothing to anyone.

No one expected the resurrection, no matter what they had seen no matter what they had heard, no matter what they had experienced. But it did happen! It happened because God made it happen. Not only did God make it happen, He went on and raised the faith of the disciples, he brought to life again their dead convictions and restored the hopes that they had lost. It is because of the Resurrection that we are here on this holy night. If it had not happened the disciples would never have gone on, they would never have had the courage, the audacity, the nerve to say another word about Jesus in public, let alone to claim that He rose and is Lord of the living and the dead.

The Resurrection mystery is the centre of our faith, it is the foundation of our Christian experience, and it is the goal toward which our lives move. Christ's Resurrection is of first importance to us, not because it is a nice ending to the story of Jesus, but because it is the beginning of our story, a story in which our faith can triumph over death just as it did the faith of Him who died and rose again. Christ our Redeemer has shown us the way, the truth and the life. We know the way to the Father that has been revealed to us by His Risen and Glorified son, we know the Truth because He has set us free, free from the sting of death which is sin and from the evil in this world. He has shown us the Risen Life, which is given to us to be the revelation and the test of love.

If we are following love, we are following light. If we are loyal to that quest, we may be quite sure that the eyes of love shall at last behold the glorious vision of the Risen Lord.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Homily for Easter Day 1st April 2018 The Priory Church of Our Lady & S. Cuthbert, Worksop.

The Gospel: S. John 20: 1-9

On this Easter Day, we celebrate with great joy the Resurrection Triumph of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus, having been raised from the powers of darkness, reigns in glory, for death has been swallowed up in victory. In today's Gospel we heard that it was still dark very early in the morning and Mary had made her way to the tomb but found that the stone covering it had been rolled away. Her initial reaction was that thieves had broken into the tomb as she found it empty. She runs back to tell Peter and John who runs ahead of Peter. John goes into the tomb to find the linen cloths on the floor. Peter catches up and goes into the tomb but fails to grasp the meaning of the sight which he sees: *the linen cloths on the floor, and the napkin that had been over Jesus' head had been rolled together in a place by itself.*

But if thieves did break into the tomb, they wouldn't take the time to tidy up after their criminal act. In their hurried confusion they would have been all the more careless. If the disciples had moved the body of Jesus, the cloths would have been on him, not left behind. Instead the evidence implies a miraculous Resurrection. The napkin twirled like a turban, as it had been on his head, lay on its own, separate from the cloths. Jesus' physical body had passed, out of its covering, into a spiritual and glorified body. When the Beloved Disciple enters the tomb he believes that Jesus has risen.

Now no one actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. It is a miracle shrouded in mystery whose secret is known only to God. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, victim no longer. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and lives now in you and in me. He has risen from the dead in order that you and I might rise to a new, better and higher life here and now, a life in which we share His Presence with each other and with all of God's children. True Christian life is life in Christ, for we have died to the world and now our true life is secure in God, hidden with Christ. This morning we receive God's gift in the Blessed Sacrament of Bread and Wine. The Easter Communion for every Christian should be the fullest possible realisation, here and now, of what it means to be living in the Hope of the Resurrection, to be preserved by His grace, and to have already entered into His fellowship. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. The unleavened bread that we partake is one of sincerity and truth, because it is made with the new yeast to leaven the dough. The old yeast reminds us of the evil and wickedness surrounding us.

We rid ourselves of the corruption and wickedness in order that we may live. Last night during the Vigil the new fire was struck, and the water in the font was blessed. We received the water in the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity as a reminder of our own baptism in Christ Jesus who died and rose again for us. And as we give thanks for this great gift, we pray for those who are preparing for this Sacrament that they may also grow in grace. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. As we see the Sanctuary of God in all its splendour, our Easter Garden is in the midst of us, the people of God in this parish church, for we are Brothers and Sisters of the Resurrection, celebrating and proclaiming the Risen Christ in our midst. May our Easter joy bring love, peace and happiness to all who believe in the power of His Glorious Resurrection.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.