

## Good Friday Homily

On this very special day, I want to reflect with you on the question: 'Where is God on Calvary?' It's not a question we can avoid. We are remembering the horrible genocide in Rwanda when approaching a million people were massacred. Where was God in Rwanda? We remember the holocaust. We have witnessed the violence of the Islamists in Iraq and Syria. We watch with horror the greed that is threatening our planet, or common home. Where is God in all this? Closer to home we are amazed at the callous treatment of refugees. We assume that people enter politics with the desire to make a difference. They want their party to rule so that they can be effective in working for the common good. Fear of losing power and so losing the chance to do good, they fear the crowd who are persuaded by the slogan of keeping our borders secure, so they enact laws that mistreat people who are looking for freedom. Where is God in all this?

John, the Beloved Disciple, shares with us what he experienced as he stood with Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross. If we are looking for an answer to the question, 'Where is God on Calvary?' We must 'look on the one we have pierced' (John 19:37). When we do so, we see love, and, as an ancient hymn says: 'Where there is love, there is God.' Let us do that now.



Let us watch the religious leaders as they look at Jesus. We get the impression that on the whole they failed to see him in their efforts to uphold what they saw as their role in preserving the tradition. But we know of two of them that did see: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. And there must have been more. In the Acts, Luke tells us that 'a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7).

We look at Judas, chosen by Jesus because of his ability to lead. But he wanted to do this his way. He believed in Jesus, but wanted Jesus to reveal his power by confronting the leaders. Judas knew Jesus would 'win'. Jesus did win, of course, but not the way Judas wanted it. Stunned, confused, he threw the money back (he never did it for the money). Tragically he despaired and took his own life. It is hard to believe that that is all there is to it. How could he forget the hug that Jesus gave him in the garden, when he called him 'friend.' Surely God, whom Jesus knew as love, did not embrace him from the tree.

We could reflect on Peter and the other disciples. We could think of Mary of Magdala. We could think of the Beloved Disciple, and the Mother. We could think of the fickle crowd, acting out of fear of their leaders. Enough of them believed in what they saw to account for us being here two thousand years later.

What effect did meeting Jesus have on Pilate? As he looked into Jesus eyes he saw enough to realise that Jesus was innocent of the crimes of which he was being accused. But the pressure was too much for him and he gave in to their demands.

Where was God on Calvary? Wherever there was love: most purely and most beautifully in Jesus. Not in his death – that was the effect of sin. Not in his death, but in the way he died: forgiving, caring, trusting, loving.



In recent years we have all been traumatized by the widespread degree of domestic violence, and the abuse of children and adolescents. Where is God in all this? It speaks of a cancer in our culture. Thank God the vast majority of families do not suffer from this sickness, but we have all been traumatized on hearing how widespread the sickness is. Institutions, including institutions that we call Christian, failed to get a handle on it.

One thing that has come out is the need for systemic change in the way our institutions are structured. This applies to political parties. It applies to government. It applies to churches. It is important that we do not identify the church with its institutional structures. These must change. But we must know that the church is the Body of Christ in the world. It is his face, his heart, his presence. His love. The first time the word 'catholic' ('universal') appears in writing is in the opening years of the second century. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch' was arrested that taken to Rome to be fed to the lions in the Colosseum. On his way he wrote: 'Where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church'. When I see, please do not blame the church. I sin because I am being unfaithful to the teaching of the church. Let us work at fixing up the way the church is organised, so long as we work from love, and from a profound gratitude that we belong to Jesus' Body. Our calling is to be His heart in the world.



To be his heart in the world we need nourishment. We need to come together to be nourished at the Eucharist. The Last Supper, as we saw yesterday, is present to us whenever we gather to celebrate Mass.

In the Synoptic account of the crucifixion we are told that the veil of the temple was rent asunder. When people spoke of seeing the face of God they meant coming to the temple. However there was a veil hiding the sanctuary. They longed for communion with God but could not see God's face. Everything changed on Calvary, for there, looking at the face of Jesus people saw the face of God revealed, and revealed as self-giving, life-giving, love.

John speaks of Jesus appearing to the disciples as they gathered on the day of the Resurrection. Thomas was not there. When the others told him of their experience he said he would not believe unless he could put his finger into Jesus' wounds, and his hand into Jesus' side. He knew Jesus. He knew that if Jesus was truly alive he would come to him as well. Jesus did so on the following Sunday. And us? We will experience the Risen Jesus when we put our fingers into his wounds. And where are Jesus' wounds. They are here. They are there. They are all over this suffering world.

Where was God on Calvary? Wherever there was love. If we cannot see love, put love there! The love that we, the branches, receive from Jesus, the vine.