

Good Friday

18<sup>th</sup> April 2025

'Triduum II: Eye-Witness to an Atrocity'

Is 52–53: *He was pierced through for our faults*

Ps 30: *My life is in Your hands, deliver me from the hands of those who hate me.*

Heb 4; 5: *During His life on earth He offered up prayer and entreaty ...*

Jn 18–19: the Passion according to John.

80 years ago this week — it was on Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> April — the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division of the British army, advancing through Germany in the dying days of the Second World War (just 23 days before VE Day on May 8<sup>th</sup>), entered and liberated Bergen-Belsen, one of the many awful concentration camps that sprang up in the 1930s and early 1940s in Germany and Nazi-occupied Poland. Travelling with the advancing British Army was a BBC journalist, Richard Dimbleby, who was the first to file a report on the conditions they found at Bergen-Belsen. His 11-min radio despatch remained unbroadcast by the BBC for 4 days, because they simply didn't believe the horrors which he described. His words, factual and unemotive, but at the same time graphic in their descriptive power, remain one of the most famous reports in war journalism. To listen to it — it's easily found on the BBC website — one cannot but be moved to tears. Yes, there had been other concentration camps liberated a bit earlier in 1945, but this was the first front-line correspondent sending back to British ears news of the gruesome reality of

what had gone on: the torture, starvation, nakedness, utter lack of sanitation, piles of unburied dead, for the 10s of 1000s of inmates, at least half of them Jews. [Listen to it, some time](#): 11 mins of your life that you won't regret giving up to learn some history, and to acknowledge, sadly, what inhumanity humanity can stoop to, when allowing evil to have a free rein.

There's another 11-min (or maybe 15-min) eye-witness report of barbarity to a Jew that is even more famous, and which we would do well to pay such attention to as to allow it permanently to affect our lives. We've just heard it: *the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John*. What cruel inhumanity we can stoop to, when faced with the sinless divinity of the Saviour, as to beat Him, try Him in a unjust court with false witnesses, pierce Him through with nails, string Him up on a Cross until He expires of asphyxiation. As we did on Sunday, so we fell to our knees today in silent contemplation of the Saviour's self-sacrifice, His willingness to "love us to the end." There are no suitable words to use to comment on this atrocity, only the grateful silence of accepting the magnificence of Jesus's mission.

When we think of the horror of sin — from the gross genocides across human history, to the day-to-day unthinkingness we might inflict on those around us, even those we love — then we see what an uphill struggle Jesus faced as He carried our sins away to the Hill of Calvary. No report, be it the eye-witness Passions of St Matthew or St John, or the mystical visions such as of Blessed Anne-Catherine Emmerich, or the imaginative accounts in films of Jesus’s Life & Death, can ever do justice to the enormity of His sacrifice. Only in the innermost depths of the Godhead can that horror be truly known: the turning-away in sin of His beloved masterpiece of creation (humanity, man & woman) capable of such generative love, and yet such destructive harm. But in the heart of the Blessed Trinity is a love infinitely greater, capable of overcoming even that great betrayal, and acting on it as Jesus did: taking those lonely and agonizing steps lashed to the Cross whilst even His apostles had, for the most part made themselves scarce.

Isaiah, inspired by God’s Spirit all those centuries

before Jesus, had seen in his mind’s eye the reality that was to befall the Messiah when He exercised His sacred ministry. The prophecy in our 1<sup>st</sup> Reading today — the 4<sup>th</sup> of Isaiah’s *Songs of the Suffering Servant* — is also a report that is difficult to hear without deep emotion, as he describes what the Holy One of God was to undergo:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces ... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, ... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth ...” (Is 53).

And yet, even Isaiah centuries before Christ knew that this was the only way, the infallible plan of God to soak up all that hatred of man, and extract the poison from the world — only the Son of God can do this emergency life-saving treatment, at the cost of His own life. Isaiah continues ...

“He has borne our griefs, He has carried our sorrows, ... upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds, we are healed.” (Is 53)

And so, we come to an inner peace this day, and we call

this Friday ‘Good.’ God has chosen to save us, even though we are unworthy: “*Let us approach the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need*” (Heb 4:16). We sing and we cry out, this day, as we accompany the Cross of Jesus, but at the end we just remain silent: we depart this Passion liturgy in utter quiet, respectful, yes, but also, please God, at peace. “*We have sinned, Lord, we have sinned,*” but “*where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.*” Amidst the horrors of moral injustice and of physical barbarity that we hear of as we see Jesus go to His Crucifixion, we can also find consolation: for the worst that humanity can do — attacking the beloved Son of God — does not de-rail the Lord’s plan, nor upset the whole purpose of the Incarnation. We can find peace, but only if we sit with it. Please find some space today if you have not already done so, just to be on your own and be quiet. Bring to mind the atrocity that we meted out on Jesus, but then see His getting up again and again from the cruelty and pressing on regardless, the liberator, the one who tends the wounds of

each and every single member of the human race who seeks Him out. “*By His wounds, we are healed.*”

A question I have asked you already at various points this Lent — and indeed need to ask myself — “How has your Lent gone?” Please God we have managed a degree of focus, and to give something more to the Lord — and to others — that we might otherwise have done. But however our Lent has been, let’s give the remainder of this Lent, this Good Friday and Holy Saturday, to Him. Think of the *desire He has* for your heart & soul, that He died for you. Let Him warm any coldness in you; let Him forgive any wrongs that sit in your heart (I’ll minister His forgiveness again after the liturgy in Confession, that loving forum of Jesus’s bringing spiritual peace); and let Him speak words of unsurpassable gentleness and love to you from the Cross, more than any person or any other creature could ever do.

“Although He was Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” (Heb 5: 8–9)