



ST ANDREW'S
CHURCH
WEST TARRING



St Symphorian's Church
DURRINGTON



ST RICHARD'S
CHURCH
MAYBRIDGE

Holy Week Homilies 2020

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Palm Sunday

It was Palm Sunday but because of a sore throat, 5-year-old Johnny stayed home from church with a babysitter. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm fronds. Johnny asked them what they were for. "People held them over Jesus' head as he walked by," his father told him. "Wouldn't you know it," Johnny fumed, "the one Sunday I don't go and he shows up."

If you've ever stood in a crowd waiting for somebody famous to turn up you will I'm sure remember how exciting it felt, waiting for the Queen or perhaps a famous singer or band, Elvis Presley or the Beatles. The people or groups evoke all sorts of feelings in us, hopes and expectations, aspirations of what we can or perhaps feel we should be. They remind us of the potential of every human being.

Jesus entry into Jerusalem was no different. I'm sure people in the crowd had all sorts of mixed motives and reasons for being there. Perhaps Jesus promised the chance of liberation from the Roman occupiers, a new Zion building a Jewish utopia or even some people were simply there because they thought he was a nice chap.

A young monk was asked by another monk whilst out for the weekly walk 'Who is Jesus Christ to you?' He was still asking himself that question fifty years later as he lay on his deathbed. We know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life but what we must ask ourselves when all the words and metaphors are stripped away is 'who is Jesus Christ to me?' Your relationship with Jesus means that you must work at it and not be afraid to sometimes say 'I don't know' because if Palm Sunday and Holy Week do anything they invite us into knowledge, the passion

and death of Jesus and receive us into the mystery of salvation that means everything and allows us to have life in all its fullness.

The events of Palm Sunday that we remember today are worth remembering! That may sound strange, but they present us again with the huge challenge and opportunity that we have had all the way through Lent. People laid palm leaves and cloaks for Jesus to pass over on his journey into Jerusalem. It seems then that the question, challenge and invitation for us today is what do I need to lay at the feet of Jesus today? And am I willing to lay the cloak of my life at his feet?

My favourite icon is one we had in our chapel when I lived in our friary in Newcastle, it is St Francis kissing the nail scarred feet of Jesus. It is a sign of total humility and surrender. We can only lay our lives before Jesus by becoming humble and being willing to surrender our lives to him. We all have bits of our lives we'd rather keep secret and not give away. It often seems easier to hold onto pain, that's like holding onto thorns that sting and cut into our flesh though. The crowd cheering Jesus where perhaps very happy because it was easier to see him entirely as the solver of all problems and ultimately that is true but the answer to our problems begins in us, Jesus says in St Johns Gospel 'I have come that you may have life and have it in all its fullness' a life only means anything when it is lived, it's often messy, distasteful and unbearably painful at times but it is always beautiful and a gift, however hard it is.

I recently heard someone say of a deceased lady 'oh she had no life' well of course she did, she'd loved, had kids, and been a friend to many. What she meant was she didn't have a posh house, or a big car or foreign holidays. None of those things matter ultimately. Everything we have and are needs to be surrendered to Jesus, the cloak of our lives need to be laid at his

feet, again and again, so that we may find our lives, this Holy Week we find ourselves separated from church, from each other and from being to make our communion. That is a great grief for us. We must be mindful of the old adage keep on keeping on! start again and again, Churchill put that another way, but it's not suitable to be repeated here!

'His state was divine, yet Jesus Christ did not cling to equality with God but emptied himself...and became as men are' He knows, he has been here, he is here and he goes on to Jerusalem to Calvary and on and on, he invites us to that holy adventure, to become humble and surrender and to find our freedom. It's ours for the taking.

Holy Monday

Hospitality is a popular word in the church now. It gets a good press with words like being welcoming and inclusive. It also has another tinge to it in church circles, we often get these noble ideas presented to us a fait accompli that we must specially focus on because it's such a new and hopeful idea for the church's future. That's nonsense!

Hospitality that doesn't come from a genuine place of deep-down joy and taking people as they are when you meet them, is just being polite. Smiling at somebody and not looking them in the eye is just being nice in a very superficial way that's more about doing what's expected than what's real desire to honour each other and real inclusion offers too the challenge of the Gospel of Jesus, to repent and be made whole, but also to sometimes very simply 'you're different and that's ok'

Real hospitality is a very vulnerable act that more ancient

cultures than ours got right in a way that was vulnerable and profound. They understood that what we are being presented with is an opportunity for grace to flow. We recently had a homeless man from Vietnam called Doong staying with us, to say that Doong's English is minimal is a bit of an understatement but what occurred was the very moving practice that Asian cultures have of bowing to each other to signify greeting and thanks, I liked Doong very much there was real grace and vulnerability in him and not just because of the situation of destitution he found himself in. About two weeks after he stayed with us, I met him again on the bus. He saw me and stood up to make his profound bow to me and I stood in the aisle dressed like this and did the same thing back to him. The other passengers on the number 12 to Roundhay Park must have been a bit bemused but real grace is vulnerable and gentle, real hospitality to one another leads us into the hospitality of God. The trinity of love where we are all held and known.

Mary! She vexes me because I really don't like her much or her whiney sister Martha. She's far too adoring, like a puppy dog, like a schoolgirl in love with a teacher.

Though, what do I know? Nothing! That lady really gets it right. She made the sweet smell of devotion with the ointment, ointment that would have cost a year's wages! the beauty of holiness was present in that simple beautiful act. It was also sophisticated too, she used the best she had for Jesus. Why? Because nothing is too good for Jesus. He deserves the best that we can bring. Nothing than all we have to offer is less than what we owe to Him.

"The true measure of loving God is to love him without measure."
St Bernard of Clairvaux

It's easy to take and be selfish, to hold back that which we need

to give away. To hoard and keep things in case we might need them later. We do all those things emotionally too. This week as we remember the events of salvation history and ponder in our hearts these stories point again and again to surrender. To find our lives, our most authentic selves in giving it, Mary gave all she had and a crowd of Jews were becoming more curious about Jesus, so curious in fact that their leaders wanted Lazarus whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead too. The disciples were still being respectable, and Mary just loved Jesus and wanted to be his friend. Human nature is a curious thing, it's where we stand or fall really, our yes to life or the slow death of sin. God is to be trusted, sometimes we can only do that a little and other times we can be like Mary and give it all our trust to Him, never ever think doing your best isn't enough and remember what we heard in our reading from Isaiah, 'I have called you by name you are mine.'

Holy Tuesday

Everything is black and white, easily slotted into place and sorted out. There are no questions, ambiguities or not totally satisfactory solutions. Have you ever found life like that? I haven't. What I have found is that people are complicated, wonderful, infuriating, loving, unpredictable and beautiful to name but a few reactions and experiences.

Judas Iscariot always gets under my skin during Holy Week. In 2018 when I was thinking about this whilst cooking or more likely incinerating something in the friary kitchen for Supper it came to me why. Judas Iscariot is like a mirror. The tragedy of Judas Iscariot is your tragedy and mine. It's because he couldn't be vulnerable enough to trust and the realisation of that broke his heart so badly, he was driven in his sadness and despair to

take his own life.

His actions are not the typical and simple actions of a thief. After all, why would he have done that for the years of Jesus' ministry and lived as a disciple with all the hardships an itinerant lifestyle can involve. He doesn't seem to have been a man who stood out from the crowd with unusual behaviour in those three years.

Not being vulnerable enough to trust often happens because of past hurts and disappointments but also because the person who have invested in isn't the person, we wanted them to be. One of the greatest heresies and failings is when we make God in our own image and forget that He is a God who saves through grace not through our own constructions and fantasies about him. I remember as a kid growing up in church one lady solemnly telling me that she wouldn't die before the Lord Jesus returned to earth. She died of cancer in 2010. The rapture hadn't happened and now twenty years later I wonder if she said those things because she couldn't deal with the death of a husband she had been utterly devoted to but didn't feel able to express how much grief she had because somehow that would undermine her faith in God.

Perhaps Jesus had disappointed Jesus because he hadn't sorted the world out, not got rid of the grinding injustices of life under Roman occupation, he'd said they needed to love one another and forgive their enemies. In my past I can see in my own experiences and failures times when I've made God into who I wanted Him to be and not been open to the possibility that He is always inviting us to trust in Him.

As we face up to the fears that threaten to engulf our world and everything, we hold dear. Now is the time Brother and Sisters to say yes to Him. That can be with a very ragged commitment and very frail faith. It's ok to doubt, it's grit in the oyster that makes

the pearl of faith. St Clare of Assisi wrote to her sister Agnes of the Lord Jesus her Spouse and said 'Totally love him who gave himself totally for your love' that's the challenge and true pilgrimage of the human heart. Where all life begins in the life and death of Jesus. Judas couldn't see that, don't let that be your tragedy, our vulnerable trust keeps us together as a fellowship, as a communion made one in the body of Christ. If we're going to walk on water, we need to be prepared to get our feet wet and say, 'yes Lord I believe' and when that's hard to trust enough to give it one more try!

Holy Wednesday

One of the challenges of following Jesus is that all the worldly standards that are presented to us as what we should accept as the be all and end all are often not. This is never truer than with our understanding of glory.

We British do glorious things very well, the changing of the guard and the state opening of parliament for instance and we like a nice boat! It's all fleeting though, it's beautiful and sends the senses reeling with feelings of pride and joy that fire the imagination and the heart, but it passes. Our glory is the glory of the cross, the man of sorrows who was lifted high to draw all men to himself in the freedom of following Jesus and saying yes to him and out of the choice of the cross that Jesus made.

Holy Week is not the story of Jesus dying for the sins of the world, as if this was his and God's purpose for his life. Rather, it is the story of Jesus' passion for God and the kingdom of God, his challenge to the combination of religious and political authority that ruled his world, and his vindication by God. Jesus' death was a sacrifice – but not a sacrifice required by God as

payment for sin. Rather, he was willing to sacrifice his life because of his passion for God and the kingdom of God. In this sense of sacrifice, three Christian martyrs of the 20th century sacrificed their lives because of their passion for a different kind of world: Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany, Martin Luther King, Jr., in America and Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. Sacrifice, yes; substitutionary payment, no

The root of the cross is not justice, though its fruit be mercy. The root of the cross is love. It is a gift given out of unrestrained love that only found it's fulness and its glorious presence before the eyes of men on the wood of the cross as Jesus died a criminal's death. God's justice which should be our punishment for sin is subordinate to his love. Justice and judgement are properties of his character, but love is God's essential self, scripture is clear "God is love"

The thing about love is that it's hard. It's costly, it doesn't come with any guarantees of not being messy or causing pain, what love does guarantee though is that it's what makes us human. Real love turns everything upside down and calls us out of ourselves. In his usual delightful way Timothy Radcliffe OP in an article called 'learning to see' shared how he had come to terms with a cancer diagnosis and what it had taught him about mortality – and patience. The article ended with, '[t]here is so much to be let go: people whom we love, health, beauty, teeth and hair, life. Perhaps the toughest is to let go of being the centre of the world.

When we do this, when we give up our self-centeredness and stop being the centre of the world or try to stop being the centre of other people's something wonderful happens – we can allow God to become the centre. This isn't a journey we make alone though, we do it in the company of other believers and in the company of those who have gone before. Jesus is the pioneer of

our faith, you can go out and look for the pioneer or we can acknowledge that perhaps we already have Him in us and with us.

Poets, story-tellers and other observers and commentators on the human condition have occasionally pointed out the curious fact that in order to arrive at an intended destination the traveler sometimes has to go by a roundabout and circuitous route. Alice at the beginning of her adventures in the Looking Glass world, you may remember, had to go off in the opposite direction in order to reach the place where she wanted to be. Not surprisingly, she found this most provoking and extremely disconcerting. Or there was the Rabbi of Cracow, who had to make the long journey to Prague in order to discover that the hidden treasure he had been told about in a dream was buried under the hearthstone in his home in Cracow. Then there was the younger son in the Lord's Parable who had to go into the 'far country' in order that he might 'come to himself' and so discover who he really was and where he truly belonged.

Nothing puts us outside of the love of God and nothing is more glorious than the holy Cross where all our lives meet, and all sins are gloriously forgiven.

Maundy Thursday

'Get away let him hurt me not you' where the final words of Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spennings in West Yorkshire to her assistants as she was murdered by Thomas Mair, a deeply troubled man outside a library in her constituency last Summer. That week we also had a member of the House of Lords staying with us, who knew Jo and was terribly and understandably upset by the tragedy. She had lost a friend. A friend who had lost her life,

thinking of others to the end. Jo Cox was Christ-like that day. She had not been able to hold onto her life and had chosen to use her suffering to protect others, I said to the lady staying with us as I checked on her that night all I could say was 'I'm so sorry' and we shared pain together and with Jesus, who shares our sorrows with us always.

This is the last time that the gang are all together that group of misfits. An inner circle that was perhaps the motliest crew that the world has ever known. The climax of the drama of Holy Week draws near. Calvary looms on the horizon and Jesus is somewhere else mentally we might think.

Jesus was the freest man in that room, he had come to the moment of choice, to when integrity is enacted and when we can all stand or fall by the choices we make. The story that we have remembered this week is not just the story of Jesus, happening two thousand years ago, but it's also our story and it's always happening. The passion of Jesus is always going on. History is living and active. This is never truer than in salvation history.

The lamb is the great figure of sacrifice – a lamb pure and spotless, 'without blemish'; that is the only kind of lamb to be offered to God. It was offered in Egypt so that it could provide the blood for the Lord's Passover – the angel of the Lord will pass over the children of Israel, not killing their oldest sons. The blood of the lamb protects the people from the divine wrath. The wrath of God is justly poured out on the world; such is the sin of the world but Jesus the Lamb of God places himself in its way. He sacrifices himself allowing his blood to divert the wrath, to absorb it, to transform it into love.

Again in Jewish religion the lamb which is offered brings about the reconciliation of God and his people. The lamb is offered for

the people's sins. It is supposed to take away the sins of the people so that they can come back to God pure and without sin. Yet how can a lamb do that? An ordinary lamb cannot do it. Only this lamb, the lamb of God, can take away the sins of the world and truly restore the people to God. This is the lamb that is offered in sacrifice on the Cross. It differs from all other lambs not just because it is a human being, not just because it is also the Son of God but because it goes willingly to its death. This lamb offers itself. Violence has come upon it, yet violence has been willingly embraced. Death will come upon it, because it allows the death to come so that love may find its way to the very end of all things, the terrible death of a Cross.

How does this touch us? It is in the daily presentation of that death on the Cross, the one which happens when "we do this in memory of him". "This is my body, broken for you...This is my blood." Jesus had to die to be able to make his body and blood over to us. The body was broken, the blood poured out so that it could be broken and poured out over and over again on our altars. It is offered to take away our sins; it averts the wrath of God and replaces it with his love and it takes us into the very heart of the lamb of God purifying us from our sins and leading us into the heart of God. It is a mind blowing and generous action on the part of Jesus to give us his own flesh and it happens to us not just once but repeatedly. This is humility, this is what ties up his foot washing, his death and his self-giving again and again in the eucharist. That is why when Notre Dame was burning a year ago in Paris, Father Jean-Marc Fournier, chaplain to the Paris Fire Brigade, entered that burning building where beautiful and priceless art and history belonged to rescue the Blessed Sacrament, the presence of Jesus in the Sacrament because nothing was more valuable than that. Jesus Christ is here because he wants to be, because we are so much the object of the Father's love, the Godhead cannot bare to be parted from us.

Yet before we can do that, we have one painful lesson to learn: "The Son man came not to be served, but to serve". The Son of God not only takes human flesh; he seeks the lowest place. He will not let himself be proclaimed as a King. He will not let people dress him up in Kingly robes. He will be a servant washing the feet of his disciples. Most of us feel uncomfortable when we see Jesus doing this; we know it means we should do the same. It is even more uncomfortable when we realise Jesus is going to wash our feet. He places himself below us. He is the servant; we are the masters. From now until he dies on the Cross Jesus takes the lowest place, as servant washing our feet, as prisoner abused by Jewish priests and roman soldiers, as criminal dragged along the road before a shouting, mocking crowd and as a naked body nailed to a tree. As Rowan Williams once said, Jesus takes the lowest place so completely that no one has ever been able to take it from him.

This night we give thanks for the God man who comes to us, who washes our feet, weeps with us and with open hands and open heart walks into the future with God his Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them until the end. May we ever strive to do the same.

Good Friday

Whenever we find ourselves outside the circle of the healthy and vibrancy, on a sick bed alone, with the sure knowledge that, despite the love and support of family and friends, in the end it is us, by ourselves, who face disability and disfigurement, who have to lose a breast or an organ to surgery, who face chemotherapy and maybe death, when we are alone inside of that, alone inside of fear, we are feeling what Jesus felt on Good Friday.

Whenever we find ourselves alone inside duty, bound by moral chains we cannot explain, tied down in our freedom so as to be seen as too timid, too frigid, too afraid to pick up our own lives, when innocence and duty are seen as a weakness, when circumstance steals away our dreams and what we would want for ourselves we need to give to others, we are feeling what Jesus felt on Good Friday.

Whenever we are misunderstood and because of that are made to look weak, bad, wrong, when we have to live with a misunderstanding that makes us look bad in the eyes of others, we are feeling what Jesus felt on Good Friday.

Whenever we experience the pain of inadequate self-expression, when there are masterpieces inside us that will never see the light of day because we cannot express ourselves, when we feel the pain that comes from knowing that most of what is best inside us will die with us, unexpressed, seemingly wasted, we are feeling what Jesus felt on Good Friday.

Whenever we find ourselves the object of jealousy, animosity, and threat because of what we believe in, when what is virtue in us is made to look like selfishness, when we are made to feel shame for what we believe in, when what is precious to us is deemed offensive to others, we are feeling what Jesus felt on Good Friday.

This is the day, the final terrible stage of the journey. Abandoned, interrogated, hated, beaten, tortured, Jesus has come to the end. Carrying a cross, the size and weight of a small tree, exhausted and drenched in his own blood. This is the day, when man murders God. The Word became flesh and died as we die, slowly and horribly. The full weight of Roman torture has been visited upon Him.

A day to mourn...well perhaps! It is most definitely a day to be mindful of our sin, those things we have done and which we have left undone. The full of horror of Good Friday is in its human cost to horrible to contemplate, but on the divine level, death has been swallowed up in victory. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews 'he became for all who obey him the source of salvation'

Betrayed by one friend, denied three times by another, the others had run scared, arrested, condemned, tortured and beaten, the degradation endured and the humiliation of incalculable awfulness, the crowd that had welcomed now pulsing with hate. He held to his trust in God, though his body and his life had been ripped apart. God is our beginning and our end. The Great Mystery. Let us walk with Jesus to that place and embrace its weight and its glory, life is not far away.

A very lovely prayer of the Orthodox Church, short and sweet 'behold through the cross joy has come into the world' Jesus dying has made the light shine for us all in the darkness of our sin and our fallenness.

Remember what you have done wrong, but hold onto the promises of God and trust in Jesus and say with hope 'Holy God, Holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy on us' The Cross proclaims what love can and will achieve. It has no limit and no end.

Jesus has known all suffering, all loss, all our experiences we share with him. The God man crucified and we become hidden in his wounds, washed in the tide flowing from his pierced side and we share in that eternal now of forever that began two thousand years ago. Thanks be to God that he takes our sins and turns them into victory. The Kingdom is on the move .

Easter Vigil

I love looking back, it's a darn sight easier than looking forward sometimes. Much better and cosier in the hazy, filtered memory bubble we like to inhabit. Life was better when....

The thing about life is that it doesn't change much we are the ones who change. We age, our views on this that and the other change, we learn the blessed release of being wrong or uncertain as a gift. Where there is there hope or any kind of certainty?

We begin our service with a service of light of Jesus rising from the dead and bringing light to all of us. The light of Christ has shone in the world scattering darkness for ever. We had been waiting for this moment for thousands of years. We hear in our readings an account of the creation of man and woman (first reading) and the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt (third reading). This was in God's plan for humankind, but the high point in God's plan for us was the resurrection. This is the greatest celebration of the Church. This day is the most blessed of all as we hear in the Exultet, the Easter Proclamation. In the New Testament reading today we heard Paul tell the Romans that when we were baptized, we left behind our old life. We, so to speak, entered the tomb with Jesus and rose again to new life. (Rom 6:3-4) When we were baptised we took on a new lifestyle, leaving sin behind to live a new life with Christ.

The risen Jesus has gone before us to Galilee. Now we will return to our ordinary lives, we will return to our own Galilee and with eyes of faith we will see the risen Jesus present in our ordinary everyday lives and meet Him in our ordinary everyday lives and there will go on learning to love Him more and more. How will the light shine? Where will our hope be found? How will it be nurtured and flourish?

Through Easter eyes, we have the blazing light of Jesus Christ, bursting forth from the tomb, calling us all by name, to adventure, to life and to a love we cannot understand but try to embrace and allow ourselves to be changed by. History hinges on Jesus, so do all our lives. His story is our story and his life will always be our life. I love the possibly apocryphal story of the Orthodox priest who was summoned to a communist party rally and told to prove that Christianity was true, he hobbled up to the speaking platform and said 'Christ is risen' and was met with a resounding 'He is risen indeed' from the packed auditorium, in a country, like so many where Christianity had been violently suppressed. This is for all of us, for all time! Let us therefore keep the feast and joyfully proclaim every day of our lives, 'Jesus is alive' and because of that we have life in all it's fulness.

Easter Sunday

We can sometimes be more than a little blasé about Easter. We've heard it all before. 'Christ is risen' oh just like last year and the year before that. For two thousand years the same story has been told again and again. We've made it our own. It's written into our culture as something which religious people and those who are not know is a moment in the year when the church gives her deepest and most profoundly joyful thanksgiving.

Today you will be viewing this Easter message in your homes, when ordinarily of course we would have been in church. These are not ordinary times, they are extraordinary. They are bewildering. They are frightening. Having to be separate from each other is a new experience and for some of us it will cut us to the quick. I miss church. I miss seeing my friends. I miss the familiar and comforting words and rhythms of the liturgy; I want

to be singing 'Jesus Christ is risen today' because this is our triumphant holy day! But we're not doing that, as the death toll continues to rise and as people in our NHS, our shops, our emergency services and perhaps in our own families are put at risk. My mum is a nurse, so I know something of the depth of that worry. Some families are separated from each other, some over continents and perhaps old hurts. So, what is it that still binds us, as church, as human beings and as individual's?

That of course is because of the ties that never break. Of love, of kindness, of compassion and most chiefly of joy. Joy isn't about being cheerful all the time. It's not about the stiff upper lip not quivering or making everything very nice. Real joy is holding onto faith, hope and love. Looking beyond ourselves to the amazing truth of God in Jesus Christ and to his resurrection. Some people would say he rose in our hearts or resurrection is a metaphor for community being formed from separation. If they speak of the resurrection of Jesus like that, they are in heresy and committing the sin of pride. It was a physical resurrection. Scripture cannot be any clearer about that. So, our joy, real deepest joy comes from an empty tomb, the womb of God being reborn. We are surrounded by death, horrible, frightening and bewildering death but we are more deeply and more victoriously surrounded by life. The risen life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your life and my life are bound up in that Resurrection. The Resurrection turns the world on its head, it did over two thousand years ago, and it does for us all today, every time when we haven't given up hope or found the strength to go on we have experienced resurrection life. It also will into the unending vision of beauty that God has prepared for all who love Him. We may be separated, facing an uncertain and frightening future but we can say with St Paul of love that

'It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures

all things.'

And with the singer Rihanna;
'We found love in a hopeless place.'

The dream of God in Jesus Christ for each of us is life and life in all it's fulness. Keeping on keeping on!

God love you and Mary pray for you.