

Reflection: Monday of Holy Week

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Those of you who know me will be aware that one of my favourite pass times is walking: sometimes gentle walks in the Cotswolds, more often (until recently) more energetic walks in places such as the Peak District.

I always remember a walk in the Derbyshire Peaks that took me to Eyam: the story of that little village made an impression on me when I started a walk near there some years ago, and the Pandemic brings it all back to me even more now. It was the time of the Plague, the Black Death, that spread across the country in the 1600s. The people of the village decided to lock themselves in, led by their Minister, so that they would not spread the contagion to the other villages nearby. Some two thirds of them died; it is a story of self sacrifice, and a story of Faith, very relevant to Holy Week, in our present situation.

My thoughts turn to the unusual time we are in with the Pandemic, and the special week it is in the Church's Year. In a way the story of Eyam brings it all together. One of the interesting comments of a descendent of one who gave her life for others at Eyam was that "they believed in the afterlife". For us death is not the end, and it sustained people then, as it does those who believe now.

Yesterday, Palm Sunday, we read the Passion from the Gospel according to Matthew. Interestingly, in St Luke's version, after the account of the suffering and death of Jesus, you get these words following the account of the Resurrection in Chapter 24 where you have the Supper at Emmaus. Jesus and the two disciples sit down for a meal together: Jesus says "You foolish man! So slow to believe the full message of the Prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His Glory?"

The way of the Cross is Jesus' way. Our attitude must be that of Christ, who "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on the Cross" as we read in the letter to the Philippians yesterday. The way of selfless love to new life seen in Jesus was taken by the Minister and the people at Eyam, and we are filled with gratitude to see such love in the doctors, nurses, carers and others in the Pandemic in these days.

Like many of you, I am sure, I stood with my window open, and a candle lit on Thursday evening 2nd April at 8 to clap them.

The reality is that there is a good deal of fear and anxiety around with this "ghostly" enemy. We are not used in our well off society to not being in control: we are vulnerable, there is unemployment; medication and riches don't work. This experience of vulnerability that many people have to live with in poorer parts of the world, and places where there is conflict and persecution, has come home to us in the UK and to places in the USA, the richest countries in the world.

I don't know whether you saw Pope Francis walking up the steps of St Peter's in the rain last Sunday and then giving Benediction and the "Urbi et Orbi" Blessing to the world, facing the empty square: it spoke to me of our nothingness, of our total dependence on God, and at the same time his power to raise us up, as he raised up Lazarus who was at the table with him in today's Gospel, after being raised from the dead, a celebration meal with Martha and Mary.

I was watching a little boy singing "every little thing 's gonna be alright" on a Facebook Post for Palm Sunday from Our Lady of the Angels Church, Nuneaton, yesterday.

It is with that confidence, the confidence of a child, that we enter this Holy Week: one that is like no other we have experienced, but where we have the opportunity to stand back from the "business" of life and reflect on the Word of God given us in Scripture each day. This morning's Psalm 26 has these words:

"The Lord is my light and my help;

Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life ...

Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.

Hope in the Lord."

The little boy sang with a smile "Every little thing 's gonna be alright". Don't forget "This virus is infectious, but a smile is much more so."