

In our imagining, we see ourselves there at the foot of the Cross: together with Our Lady, the beloved disciple, the Magdalene and the other women. We tell ourselves, we too would be faith-filled, awestruck by the events unfolding before us.

But would this really be so? Modern psychology confirms the ancient prophecy: the crowds were so appalled, they turned their faces away. Fear and terror, joined with indignation and self-righteousness, come together in an unholy alliance; we too would probably flee, our cowardly denials trailing away on the Spring-time breeze. Why would we be different to those who first watched the spectacle? We see woundedness all around us; in the faces of young and old homeless on our city streets; in the tragedy of violent conflict; in the injustice within so many human stories, and we pass by on the other side: defeated by our lack of understanding, our sense of powerlessness, our inability to love. And all of this, because we are fallen from grace, broken under the centuries-old burden of sin.

But yet we come today, gathered together as a pilgrim people of faith, we who recognise the cradling of suffering on the wood of the Cross: the painful journey until every last drop of blood is spent. We have come to hear the invitation: *Ecce lignum Crucis* - Behold the wood of the Cross: that beholding of the Lamb of God, with which the Gospel begins the story of discipleship. We come here, not because we want to look at ourselves, but rather, to see the face of Jesus: to ponder the Cross as the Father does. It takes contemplation, to really understand what is happening here. St John of the Cross puts this best; his

drawing of Good Friday from above; the viewpoint of our heavenly Father; the foot of the Cross firmly planted in the earth of this world; a life-line between the Father's mercy and ourselves.

To understand this beholding of the Cross, we must open our hearts, to be overshadowed with a new knowing. This event is a victory: the mystery of evil is defeated. The Heart of Christ is pierced, blood and water flow out, the fount of sacramental life in the Church today. We have gathered here this afternoon; a part of that great universal victory procession. We come to claim the power of the blood which flows from this Cross.

So we do two things now. First, we pray; together with the Church throughout the world: we raise our voices in intercession for those who are in need. We have been born again in the grace of the Cross, we have been adopted as children of our heavenly Father. We can pray with the high priest, who 'during his life on earth, offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears': we who have not 'submitted so humbly', can pray in His name, Jesus, who was obedient to the Father.

Secondly, each one of us will come forward to adore the wood of the Holy Cross. Again, the words of the Letter to the Hebrews sound in our hearts: 'Let us be confident then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help.' We do not rely on our own doing of charity, our striving for hope, our yearning for faith. And neither do we have to - Jesus has died, and in His dying, is our new and eternal life.