

## A HOLY WEEK MEDITATION

### PETER: THE LOOK OF LOVE

“.....They had lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and Peter sat down among them....a servant girl peered at him and said, 'this man too was with him', but he denied it, 'Woman, I do not know him' he said.....At that instant, while he was still speaking, the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said and he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:54ff). Imagine the scene: Two men are facing each other. One is only ten hours away from death. The other has just told a group of people around a fire that he did not know the Man who was going to his death. “No, no, no” he protested, “I do not know him. I have never been with him. I swear I haven't”. And just then a cock crowed to greet the dawn. The fire and the denial were still burning. He looked at the man who stood there – just a look! Suddenly the gate was slammed shut and out into the cold dawn fled the man who had been so loud and so brave a moment earlier. He ran into the silent streets to hide himself in a corner of the great city. As he ran, hot and bitter tears flowed down his face, washing away something that was like dirt on his face and blood on his soul.

We can, perhaps understand what happened there in the courtyard. Peter standing by the fire, lying for the sake of safety and human respect, swearing falsely in order to capture a moment of warmth and acceptance from the world. Peter knew instinctively that he had broken his relationship with his Friend. He had turned his back on him. And when his Friend turned and looked at Peter, he suddenly realised what he had done and saw what he had thrown away – what he had denied, what he had betrayed!

This powerful encounter speaks to us about what it truly means to be a disciple of Christ. Peter did not deny a doctrine or broke the law, he had hurt a relationship. For Peter, all he could do was stumble out into the dark, blinded by his burning tears, afraid and alone, never ever to forget his moment of shame. Yet he was destined to hear just a few weeks later the voice of that same Friend again, compelling, warm, and healing, saying to him by the lake, “Simon, Son of John, do you love me?”

Perhaps we too have not denied any doctrines of faith or the teachings of the Church, but most certainly have broken the bond personal friendship between Jesus and ourselves. We may well have stood by the fire, eager of the world's approval, and bought it at the price of denying that we even know our Friend, Jesus our Lord and Saviour. We may not have called down curses or verbally denounced that we ever knew Christ, but we have often succumbed to a way of life that does not reflect the values and standards attributed to a follower of Jesus Christ.

We have to be aware of the enticing, burning warmth of the fires that attract us from the true path. These may lure us into the presence of “bad” company, or sway our hearts with a short wave of popularity; or we might be tempted to parade our self-importance in the presence of those around us. It won't be long before we get caught up in the moment – it may be to repeat some gossip, take the money, or perhaps worst of all when we are “socialising” with a group of people and someone starts talking about your friend behind their back, and you say nothing! Betrayal!

But then, there is always, at all times, the Look, that is the look of Jesus Christ. It may take time in coming, and it may take some time in being recognised, but Jesus is there gazing, gazing - with eyes warning, pleading, longing, loving. Sometimes he looks at us in our silent moments when we are grappling with what to do with our lives. He looks at us in our brokenness, our shattered relationships, our failing health, our financial setbacks, our (self) isolation, our bereavements, our fears. He also looks at us in the face of our friend, the goodness of our neighbour, a word from the bible. Jesus looks at us all in the midst of our

business, our activity and lets us know that we are “playing with fire”, or letting him down, but always with a look of hope and encouragement.

And if we pay heed to that look, which often leads us to open our eyes, to shed tears of regret, perhaps shame, and repentance, then we are on our way to a new dawn and we know the answer to the question he will always ask, “Do you love me.....?” And along with Peter, Mary Magdalene, Paul and all the rest, we nod “Yes”, and once more we find a true Friend. For the look of Jesus, as Peter discovered, is one of understanding love, a love that led Peter to trudge through the Mediterranean and to Rome preaching about Jesus and finally led him to lay down his life for his friend. It was the forgiving look of Jesus that would bring no more tears, no more betrayal. It was the look of friendship, the Look of Love.

#### A GOOD FRIDAY REFLECTION WITH FRANZ JAGERSTATTER

Franz Jagerstatter was a Catholic conscientious objector to Hitler’s army and was imprisoned for his beliefs and subsequently sentenced to death. He was in prison for almost six months before he was executed on August 9th 1943. This reflection is based on Franz’s writings in prison, which follows closely the Way of the Cross.

Franz makes it clear from the outset, “They may lock my body in chains, but they cannot chain my mind – neither prison, nor chains or a death sentence can rob me of my faith and free will”. This is also true of us during this coronavirus crisis – it may cause us separation and hardship, fear and loneliness, but it cannot rob us of the bonds of love or even loosen the chains of friendship that bind us together.

Franz wrote to his wife, the mother of his children, “I cannot spare you the pain that you must now suffer on my account. How hard it must have been for Jesus, our Saviour, through his sufferings, had to prepare such great sorrow for his mother. But they bore all this out of love for us sinners. I thank Jesus, that I am privileged to suffer and even die for him.” The suffering caused by the coronavirus pandemic will bear much fruit. We remember the many suffering people, especially women in the world and ask our Blessed Virgin Mother to intercede for us.

Just as Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his Cross, we too are called to help others carry their cross. We will not be able to stand waiting on the sidelines in the midst of suffering, but like Simon we are drawn into helping those in need. We pray for the courage to help us realise that we must allow ourselves to be chosen to carry the Cross of Jesus, especially in helping the elderly, the vulnerable and the sick, who are isolated and struggling to make sense of what it means to be a human being.

When we look closely at those who suffer we will begin to see the face of Jesus in them. Franz was told that what he was doing would bring suffering not just to his family, but many others. But Franz reminded them, “...it seems to me that the others who do fight in this war are not exactly free from the danger of death themselves.” May we never be paralysed by anger or faint-heartedness, but always be prepared to show the face of Jesus to a wounded world.

Franz recognises the love, loyalty and sacrifice which his wife has given in union with him, but he told her, “The hardest sacrifice will be that you can’t be angry with anyone....” We pray for the women of the world, that the Lord may bless and protect them because they are the spring of life.

When Jesus reached Golgotha they stripped him of his garments – he was naked as the day he was born. Franz says, “I wouldn’t exchange my small cell, filthy as it is, for the largest royal palace, even if I had to give up a tiny bit of my faith in return – for however magnificent and beautiful it may be, everything earthly comes to an end, but God’s word remains for all eternity. As long as I have a clear conscience I can live in peace, even in

prison.” During this coronavirus pandemic we have been stripped of our intimacy with our family and friends, of our social contacts, of our work, our holidays, some would say of our freedom. But perhaps being stripped of these treasures, we may learn to appreciate the deeper treasures that have been given to us that no disease, no power on earth can take away – our love, our faith, our integrity, our inner freedom. May we learn that glory and success are not the measures of what it means to be human, but in the way we love and to remain true to what we believe.

As we remember Jesus being nailed to the Cross, let us remember all those men and women living lives of isolation, fear, uncertainty during this coronavirus pandemic. Let us remember those who are peacemakers in the silent wars that are still going on; those who hunger and thirst for justice, who are poor among the wasteful, and who endure persecution for trying to follow Jesus, their Lord.

Jesus died violently at the hands of the state, but he did not let hatred overcome him. This Good Friday we reach out to the victims of violence in our world and pray that we may be strengthened to struggle for justice and work tirelessly and non-violently to make our world a more peaceful place to live.

Franz also died violently at the hands of the state. In his last letter to his wife he says, “....I thank you for all you have done for me, for the love and sacrifice that you have borne me: I beg you again to forgive me if I have hurt or offended you, just as I have forgiven everything. I forgive everyone from my heart. May God accept my life in reparation not only for my sins, but for the sins of others as well.” Let us give thanks for the love and support of our families, friends and parishioners; that we may love them as we should, to see the face of Jesus in them. Even at this time of social/physical distancing, we pray that we treat people with kindness and sensitivity. We pray that we will not to spread fear and suspicion, but to help create an atmosphere of welcome and acceptance. Franz was alone in a prison cell, but he remained free and connected with those he loved. May we always remember that whatever difficult, unpleasant and distressing situations this coronavirus creates, it can never take the inner freedom of the loving human heart of God’s people.