

Good Friday Homily – 2020 – Plymouth Cathedral

With what words on their lips did they die? This is a thought which has gone through my mind and heart many times in these days. Day by day, on the news, we have heard of the numbers of those who are dying with COVID 19 and unfortunately it still seems to be high in our country. One of the most painful things is of course that those who are dying are often alone, or their loved ones, cannot be with them. So the suffering and pain is intensified, the sense of loss, the sense of abandonment, the sense of isolation. But we know that whatever their last words were, they are echoed in the words from the Cross, spoken by the Son of God. In this, is our deepest consolation.

On Palm Sunday we heard the Passion account from St Matthew's Gospel. There, Jesus last words are "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"? That has probably been echoed quite a number of times in these last weeks. We hear today in the letter to the Hebrews how during His life on earth Jesus offered up prayers "aloud and in silent tears" to the one who was able to hear him. There is no human experience of desolation which the Son of God has not entered and made part of his own cry from the Cross.

In today's Gospel from St John, we hear a different tone in Jesus' last words. "It is accomplished" and He bows His head and dies. There is a sense in St John's Gospel that the Lord has completed His mission. He has done the work on earth that the Father asked of him. So, at this moment of death, He surrenders himself. He professes that in His death, His mission is accomplished. Perhaps in their minds, in their hearts, and on the lips of some of those who have died in these days, there is a sense of completing their mission on earth and of handing themselves over to the God of all Creation, in His mercy and in His infinite love.

And then in the response given in the psalm today, we are given another final word of Jesus from the cross. It's a repetition of the last words put on His lips in St Luke's Gospel "Father, into your hands I commend my

Spirit". In those last hours, we know that Jesus was himself tuning into the ancient prayers of the Jewish people, and the songs and psalms of David. Except in the psalm quoted here – Psalm 31 – Jesus changes it from "Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit" to "**Father** into your hands". He is reminding us of that intimate union there is between Son and Father. These words are not words simply to die by, but words to live by. To have trust, to believe that even in the face of the immense mystery of evil, of suffering, of death, this is not the last word of the Lord of life, the Lord of light. The Lord of goodness overcomes these things. So, it's enough for us on this day, to pray with the Lord Jesus, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit".

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