

Holy Week – Good Friday

Jesus asks pardon for those who ill-treat him.

Jesus is nailed to the Cross. And the liturgy sings: *Sweet nails, sweet tree where life begins. (Crux fidelis)*

The whole of Jesus' life is directed towards this supreme moment. He has barely managed, gasping and exhausted, to get to the top of that hillock called 'the place of skulls'. The executioners stretch him out on the ground and begin nailing him to the wood. They place the nails first into his palms, piercing his torn flesh. Then he is hoisted up until he hangs straight from the vertical shaft of wood which has been fixed into the ground. The feet are then nailed. Mary, his Mother, contemplates the scene.

The Lord is firmly nailed to the cross. He has waited for this for many years, and this day He is to fulfil his desire to redeem all men ... What until now has been an instrument of infamy and dishonour, has been converted into the tree of life and the stairway of glory. A deep joy fills him as he extends his arms on the cross, for all those sinners who will approach him will now know that he will welcome them with open arms ...

He saw – and this filled him with joy – how the cross was to be loved and to be adored, because he was going to die on it. He saw the witnessing saints who for love and in defence of the truth were to suffer a similar martyrdom. He saw the love of his friends; he saw their tears at the foot of the cross. *He saw the triumph and the victories Christians would achieve under the standard of the cross. He saw the great miracles which, with the sign of the cross, would be performed throughout the world. He saw so very many men who, with their lives, were going to be saints, because they would know how to die like him, overcoming sin.* (L. de la Palma, *The Passion of the Lord*) He reflected on the many occasions we would kiss the crucifix; on our beginning again so often ...

Jesus is raised on the cross. Around him is a distressing scene. Some pass by, and jeer; the chief priests, more scathing and sarcastic, scoff at him; others, indifferent, are mere spectators. There is no reproach in Jesus' eyes – only pity and compassion. He is offered harsh wine and myrrh. *Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their misfortune, and remember their misery no*

more. (Prov 31:6-7) It was the custom to make such humanitarian gestures with condemned men. The drink – a strong rough wine with some myrrh – had a numbing effect and made the suffering more bearable.

Our Lord tasted it as a sign of gratitude towards the person who offered it to him, but wished to take no more, so as to drain the chalice of suffering. *Why so much suffering?* asks St Augustine. And he replies: *Everything he suffered was the price of our ransom.* He was not content to suffer a little; he wished to drink the chalice to the dregs without leaving a single drop behind, so that we might learn the greatness of his love and the baseness of sin, so that we may be generous in self-giving, in mortification and in the service of others.