

Palm Sunday (A)
(Isaiah 50:4-7 / Matthew 26:14-27:66)
13.04.2014

Let us remain with the first part of the Passion narrative heard this morning.
I suspect we can all readily relate to this section of the story, for it flags up for us a source of pain and suffering experienced in many of our lives.

I am thinking of the pain and suffering associated with experiences of betrayals and disappointments.

Who among us has not known some betrayal in our lives?
Others will have disappointed us and we will have disappointed others.

How do we cope, how can we cope, with betrayals, disappointments, deceptions in our lives?
Usually, we do so with great difficulty!

This is where the example Jesus gives us in the story of His Passion and in the Post-Resurrection appearances of the gospels comes in to instruct us.

What we see Jesus do when He is hurt is not to deny the reality of the situation in which He finds Himself and yet, at the same time, not to allow this situation to crush or submerge Him.
Clearly Jesus resisted the temptation to allow the pain He endured in life to harden or embitter Him.
Jesus did not allow His suffering to rob Him of His inner freedom.

The gospels show us how Jesus kept His heart open in His sufferings and trials – with all the consequences involved in this deliberate, nothing less than heroic, choice.

Jesus' open heart meant that the pain afflicted upon Him had a felt impact and it was felt acutely.
But Jesus' open heart also meant that the pain He endured found release. Jesus did not retain His pain. He did not lock it into His heart.
He did not allow Himself to be locked in and held captive by it.

In the Passion story we are given to contemplate the open heart of Jesus.
When we look to Jesus lifted up upon the cross what we see is a wounded heart: a heart wounded not just by the lance that pierced Jesus' side, but, before and beyond that, a heart wounded by love.
Jesus felt for those who wronged Him. He still loved them.
Even when Judas came to betray Jesus with a kiss (the arranged sign Judas had given to those who came with him to arrest Jesus) the Master addressed his betrayer thus: *My friend*.

Any of us who dare to love will inevitably have encountered and known pain and suffering in our lives.
I often recall a word spoken by our late abbot, Dom Paul Grammont: *There is no true love that is not one day crucified*.

Even if no offence is ever committed against us, if we truly love another, we will know the pain and wound of love in our hearts.
This is because we will feel a heartache not to be able to love our loved one even more than we already do.
What I am saying here is this: true love can never feel self-satisfied.
To some extent, true love will always awaken within the lover's heart a certain feeling of dissatisfaction, for it is love's nature to make the lover want to give of him or her self even more to

their loved one.

Of course, it is also true that if we feel loved by another we will also desire to be loved even more by that person.

This is because love is infinite. And so we know that there is always more love possible.

We call this great week *Passion Week*.

We call it *Passion Week* because today and in the coming days we will commemorate the Lord's Sacred Passion: the great suffering Christ endured for us.

But we could also understand these days as *Passion Week* in the sense of being the week in which we commemorate God's passionate love for us: what has been called His *mad, crazy love* for us.

What is revealed to us as we read the accounts of Christ's Passion and contemplate all that Jesus lived for our redemption, is that God's love for us is of such great strength that it dares without fear or shame to manifest itself in humility, weakness and even in extreme vulnerability.

This should not surprise us.

Any of us who have experienced authentic love in our lives will know that it is in love's nature to lead the lover to humble him or herself before the loved one: to come before their loved one not in a posture of domination, but in a spirit of poverty and weakness. A true lover will come before his or her loved one in mendicancy, begging for the grace to have his or her love accepted and also for the grace to be shown love by their loved one in return.

I see the Passion story challenging us to situate ourselves as Jesus did before all, including those who betrayed and disappointed Him. In Jesus' life there were many who betrayed and disappointed Him ... most significantly many of these were people He had trusted and loved, called and chosen: among them were His closest disciples, the apostles, and as we heard today, there was in particular Peter and Judas.

As we draw this first part of our reflection to a close, might I suggest that we just hold on to two signs of Jesus' attitude of openness in regard to those who betrayed Him and that we dare to apply these two signs of Jesus' love to ourselves?

I think of the regard Jesus posed upon Peter in His trial and the kiss He exchanged with Judas in the garden.

Jesus could have chosen to blank Peter out, to ignore him, but He didn't.

Jesus looked at Peter as He did upon the rich young man whom we met earlier in the gospel story, the rich young man who turned away from Jesus and failed to Him. He looked upon Peter and He loved Him.

Knowing that Judas came to betray Him with a kiss, Jesus could have rebuffed Judas, but He did not do this. He allowed Himself to be kissed by the one who had given this as a signal to those who came to arrest Him.

Thus Jesus shows us the way we must take.

Jesus shows us that while we must not deny the hurt caused to us by pretending it never happened, neither must we hold the other or ourselves captives of the wrong done to us.

We must strive to remain free, open, ready to look at those who have wronged us with a regard of compassion. Even more than that, we must be ready to embrace our betrayers truly, with love, even if what they signify by their gestures in our regard is feigned, untrue, a travesty and a betrayal.

So much for how to situate ourselves when we have been wronged.

Before closing, we need to ask ourselves another, related question.

What if and when we have wronged another? We all have! What do we need to do then?

Various steps are required of us.

To begin with, wherever possible, we must humbly ask pardon and make amends.

That is quite a tall order!

I won't go through all the other steps required of us to make up to someone we have wronged here.

What I will do is concentrate on the final step required of us, which often proves to be the hardest step of all.

The final step is to forgive our self for the wrong we have committed, by which I mean to allow our self to receive the pardon shown to us, if not by the person we have offended, at least the pardon given to us by God.

This step is no mean feat.

It is really quite a challenge for most of us to accept to be pardoned.

Have we not all said at one stage or other: *I just can't forgive myself for that!*

Well, at one level, we cannot, but, at another level, we can!

We cannot do it by our self alone, but with Christ we can!

We can forgive ourselves as long as we are living our lives in relationship with the Lord who is the source of all pardoning grace.

We can forgive ourselves when we come to the point where we can say with the apostle Paul: *I live not by myself alone, but by the power of God's grace at work within me.*

To fail to forgive our self for our betrayals is to deny the work of the cross.

It is to hold our self back from living what the cross wants to see us attain: life renewed!

Christ died on the cross out of love for us. He gave His life for our salvation. He offers us not just healing and restoration, but a completely new life.

He wants to see us live our new life in freedom, in confidence and in trust.

Great humility of heart is required of us to welcome and accept the entirely fresh start in life Christ offers to us!

We show that we have welcomed and believed in God's forgiveness by daring to do for ourselves what the Lord has done for us.

And so, we could say, to refuse to forgive ourselves is to refuse God's forgiveness

By the help of God's grace, may we all be led to the point where we can forgive ourselves as we have been forgiven!

May we come to the point where we can live in regard to ourselves what Jesus is shown to have lived in regard to His betrayers.

May we be able to embrace our flawed lives and look at ourselves as we are, without denying our betrayals, but nonetheless sure and certain that we are loved and forgiven with a love beyond all telling, with a love which has loved us to the folly of the cross!

Yes, God's love for His people, His love for you and for me, is *mad, crazy love* indeed!

Amen!