

In the Passover story a paschal lamb is sacrificed and its spilt blood defined the Hebrews as God's people. That identification brought liberation from slavery in Egypt. But Liberty was at a cost: the lamb's death was necessary to demonstrate their Bond with the God of Moses, their willingness to be obedient in the wilderness, on the journey of faith they embarked upon. For us, Jesus is the Paschal Lamb, an innocent whose death rescues all from the slavery of sin so entrapping humanity. Only Jesus, the new Adam, born without sin is the acceptable paschal sacrifice, only his blood can redeem us, restore the Bond of Faith, establish the new Covenant, that will not be corrupted. *O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.* Redemption means to be rescued, and because of love, God rescues us.

- **How have we responded to being liberated and fully God's people?**
- **What makes it apparent to others (and ourselves) that we live as God's children and disciples of Jesus?**

Jesus' incarnation and crucifixion are signs that God is 'standing alongside' our experience of life, be it joyous or wretched, isolated or in community. God is not detached from his creation. God becomes a person as Jesus, lives our life and dies our death. God knows our human nature, fears and happiness; he fully knows our human suffering and frailties because in Jesus he shares them. So it is we know God walks with us at all times and in all places, will be with us as we face the realities of life in the world, and will sustain us even in death: *And in the garden secretly, and on the cross on high, should teach his brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.*

Elie Wiesel in *Night* (1958) describes an experience at Auschwitz, the Nazi death-camp in Poland.

'The SS hung two Jewish men and a boy before the assembled inhabitants of the camp. The man dies quickly, but the death struggle of the boy lasted half an hour. "Where is God? Where is he? a man behind me asked. And I heard the voice within me answer, "Here he is - he is hanging here on the gallows".'

Praise to the holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise: in all his ways most wonderful, most sure in all his ways.

Good Friday

We adore you , O Christ, and we bless you

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



**Blessed are you Sovereign God, gracious and merciful,
You deal gently with those who go astray,
And call those in darkness into the light of your presence.
In the path of suffering Jesus learned obedience;
With us as a brother he faced testing without sin;
On a hill of darkness he carried judgement for the world;
Merciful and faithful High Priest in the realm of light,
He is strong to save all who draw near through him.
Through the eternal Spirit he awakens us to serve you.
Friend of sinners, healer of the nations,
Blessed are you, Sovereign God, who scatters the darkness.**

Michael Vasey

Readings: John 19.17-42 Hebrews 10.15-25

Hymn

St John Henry Newman

Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise;
In all His words most wonderful, most sure in all His ways.

O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine,
God's Presence and His very Self, and Essence all divine.

O generous love! that He, who smote, in Man for man the foe,
The double agony in Man for man should undergo.

And in the garden secretly, and on the Cross on high,
Should teach His brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.

Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise;
In all His words most wonderful, Most sure in all His ways.

There is no escaping the reality of the death of Jesus on the Cross.

For us to bear the weight of the horror and savagery of this terrible day, we too have to believe that Jesus' suffering was necessary, that it had a purpose, was part of the Divine plan for the salvation of humanity and that Jesus had consented to facing such an ordeal, doing his Father's will as we see in his prayer in Gethsemane. We struggle to find sense in such abject horror, just as we live in the face of continuing human brutality and our destructive inclination so evident in the world.

Christians have had to face this challenge and apparent contradiction, of our all-powerful God rendered powerless as he hangs as Jesus mocked and abused on the Cross. St John Newman's wonderful hymn, *Praise to the holiest in the Height* expresses this powerfully.

First we have the strands of an idea of a divine order from Persia, with God locked in Cosmic battle with his enemy who is intent on thwarting Goodness and seizing Creation. *O wisest Love! That flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.*

- **How do we see this powerful strand of belief that is still present in our language, hymns and culture?**

Before Easter humankind had been taken captive by Satan and is totally ensnared, 'chained' as Wesley put it, controlled by the powers of evil. God's loving desire is to regain what is rightfully his yet he must pay a ransom –and that demanded is the life of his own Son. Jesus' death brings liberation for humankind from the slavery of Satan.

- **How are we still ensnared in our lives to things we know are destructive to ourselves, our neighbours and our planet?**

St Anselm's (*Cur Deus Homo*) answer to the question is simply the need of Satisfaction of Sin. In the world of courtly etiquette the divine order was also governed by an honour code: no sin can be forgiven without 'satisfaction'. A debt to Divine justice has been incurred; and needs paying. But one of us could not possibly do this or 'satisfy' the offence; the debt is something far too great. Ironically, only God can pay the price or 'satisfaction' even though it is God who has been wronged by our sin. Humankind should pay but only God is able. The solution to this dilemma is for a divine-man, Jesus, to bear the cost on the Cross. *And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine, God's presence and his very self, and essence all-divine.*

- **Where do we see examples of people giving of their very self?**
- **Pray for those embodying this costly willingness to serve others.**
- **How can we strive to do the same in our everyday life?**

In antiquity, on the Day of Atonement, the Jewish chief priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem, prayed over an innocent goat for the sins of the entire people to be blotted out; the animal was then taken out in to the wilderness where it was left to die. In this way the goat's death marked the 'death' of the peoples' sins and they could again be one with God. A scapegoat. Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world.

On Good Friday God, supplies the sacrifice, as he had for Abraham in lieu of Isaac, but this time it is of his own self, restoring the covenant through Jesus' blood. *O generous Love! That he who smote in man for man the foe, the double agony in man for man should undergo.*