

Lenten Devotional Reflection
11th March, 2020 (Lent Day Thirteen)

Scripture: Hebrews 2: 10-end New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Here am I and the children whom God has given me.”

¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Message

We all fear death. Christians can be afraid to admit this either to themselves or to each other. But we do fear death, no matter how much we might pretend not to. Why else are we so worried about COVID-19, for example? We feel, however, that if we admit to our fear, we might be letting God down or that people will think we do not have enough faith. As we look to Easter, we naturally think that the message of Christ's resurrection and his triumph over death mean that we should not worry at all about death.

How quickly we forget the message of Lent and Good Friday.

Jesus went to his death, not lightly like a Greek hero, but sweating as it were drops of blood and repeatedly asking his Father to spare him.

Death is horrible. It robs us of life and robs us of those we love and care for. It is terrible, so terrible, that God himself had to intervene in the person of his Son to deal with it. And that was no easy thing. It was not about a bit of inconsequential, momentary pain. It was not just a minor inconvenience in the divine plan for us.

So, don't let people tell you that as a Christian death doesn't matter.

There is an appalling poem often said with the best of intentions at funerals. It has the lines in it, 'Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away.' Tell that to our Lord who had to suffer and die for us. Tell that to a mum who has just lost her baby through an unexplained cot death. Tell it to a man whose wife has just died before his eyes of cancer. Tell it to the person who has lost his family in a natural disaster or through war and violence. Death is nothing at all? Get real! Instead, what we should be feeling as we come face to face with death is the anger and pain that the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, expressed: 'Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

Christ has triumphed over death. But he had to go through death first and so do we. Death, St Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, is last enemy still to be defeated. What Christ's triumph does for us is to give us hope that one day it truly will be defeated.

So, yes, for now, we shrink from death, as Jesus himself did, but we know that God will be with us as we journey through it as he was with his Son. We know too that, although death is an enemy we all have to meet, God will raise us up just as he raised his Son. And one day we will live with him forever.

In the meantime, we take to heart the words of the Ash Wednesday service with which we began Lent:

*'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.'*

Meditation

1. How honest am I with myself about how I feel about the prospect of my own death?
2. How much do I feel the pain of those who have been bereaved?
3. Does remembering I will die lead me to turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ?

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