

Lent 2. 2021. Following the Way of the Cross. St. Mark Ch8 v31.

Jesus pursued His earthly ministry far and wide both teaching and healing, leading people to ask "Who is this?" Even the disciples were perplexed. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus confronted them with the questions "Who do people say I am?" followed by "Who do you say I am?" You can imagine the stunned silence. It was Peter who spoke up. He said "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." This was the turning point in Our Lord's Ministry. St Mark wrote "Then Jesus began to teach His disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering....to be killed and after three days, rise again." The Crucifixion of Our Lord is central to our faith. St. Paul wrote "We proclaim Christ, yes, Christ nailed to the cross and though a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, yet to those who have heard His call He is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

But why the Cross? For inspiration or to attract peoples' attention? Should we not look to the Sermon on the Mount or St. Paul's eulogy on love? Although people gladly heard Jesus, although He went about doing good and in Ezekiel's words Jesus had come "to seek the lost, recover the straggler and to bandage the hurt" it was the cross which defined His ministry. This is emphasized by the fact that a third of the Gospel Narratives are devoted to the last week of Jesus' earthly life; His passion and crucifixion. What therefore does the Cross proclaim? It proclaims that there is no place in which a person may find him/ herself where the Christ-like God and His love and compassion are not present. The person suffering loss, discovers the Christ on the Cross, knows the experience of personal loss. The person facing pain, the person facing humiliation, the person experiencing rejection; all discover that there is no place where the crucified Christ has not been and still occupies.

Bishop Dehqani Tafti an exiled Iranian bishop, speaking about his situation and the suffering of Christians said "The way of the Cross has suddenly become so meaningful as we willingly walk in it with our Lord near us. Our numbers have become smaller; our earthly support has gone, but we are learning the meaning of the cross and our faith in a new way." Such words bear out St. Paul's conviction "For I am sure of this....That nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is a conviction which many have experienced down the ages.

After the turning point in Jesus' ministry, when he began to prepare the disciples to walk with Him the way of the cross, unlike us, they did not have the experience of Easter with its message of new life and hope. As we too, this Lent, walk the way of the cross there are three things we can do: First, to look up at the Cross and reflect that the love of God is never in doubt. Secondly, to look out on the world from behind the Cross; to see people with the eyes of Christ and the hopes and fears which they face. Lastly, to go out into the world and our communities from before the Cross in Christ's name, to stand along side them in their need; to heal relationships and to reflect His love and care.

A prayer. Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain and entered not into glory before He was crucified; mercifully grant that we, walking the way of the Cross may find it none other than the way to life and peace. Amen

