

Meditation for a Good Friday.

Good Friday, and what a strange Good Friday! Karl Marx once described religion as “The Opiate of the people”. He believed that religion tries to take the pain out of suffering, to pretend that it is not real. Well; Good Friday is the Church’s answer to that charge, far from denying the reality of human suffering, Good Friday faces it head on.

All of us at some time or other are faced with the reality of suffering one way or another. Think for a moment. There’s the ongoing suffering of war in so many parts of the world, the suffering caused by tyranny and oppression, the suffering of men and women imprisoned unjustly , and often tortured, the abduction and murder of children in different parts of the world. So much suffering!

Here at home there’s the suffering of the homeless, and many who are simply inadequate, and can’t cope with the demands of modern living. People suffering from all kinds of mental stress. Particularly this year there’s the suffering of sickness and pain, the anguish of those who care for their loved ones in suffering and death, never more so perhaps than now in this present crisis.

Alongside this, there’s the unseen suffering of so many lonely people, who for whatever reason are isolated and alone. This year many of us have discovered for ourselves, perhaps for the first time, the experience of loneliness. It is easy to believe in God when all is going well, but where is God in the suffering and anguish of our world?

The Church’s only answer is to point to the figure of Jesus nailed to the Cross. God Himself became man. Our Lord’s death agony on the Cross is no pretence.

The Gospel writers make no attempt to avoid the stark reality of his suffering, both physical and mental. It is God Himself hanging there on the Cross. It is God Himself suffering there out of love, suffering with us and for us, God made man. The Cross is the measure of God’s love for us.

Today is “Good Friday” nonetheless, because this is not the end of the story. Good Friday is the prelude to Easter, but it is the essential prelude. Good Friday tells us that human suffering is real, and that Christ experienced that reality in all its horror. The mystery of Easter allows us to see that suffering in a new light. In rising from the dead Christ has demonstrated that love is stronger than suffering and even death itself.

In the midst of human suffering and loneliness Christ is with us, and He assures us that His love, which led him to the Cross will never desert us. He assures us that trusting in Him we too will experience in God’s good time the joy of the Resurrection.

May God be close to all of us this afternoon, but especially those who are suffering in any way.