

### Living the Word: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Isaiah begins his depiction of the 'suffering servant' with a question: 'To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' (53.1). Up to this point in the Bible, the 'arm of the Lord' has always been language for God's almighty power and supreme strength. And soon, Isaiah tells his readers, the 'arm of the Lord' will be fully revealed... but as a weak and afflicted man. That's the shocking prophecy of this passage – God would finally come to his people, and he would be despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with infirmity. The God who comes to us in Jesus Christ – in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy – is the God who suffers and dies on the Cross of Good Friday. Yet, for Isaiah, this is not some sad defeat, or some random accident of history – for the Son of God 'was wounded for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed' (53.5). The Cross is the glory of God shown in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, in agony and defeat, Christ dies in our place, reconciles us to the Father, and brings us wayward sheep back home.

### Elements of the Mass: Behold the Wood of the Cross

'Behold the wood of the cross...' is the beginning of the English version of the ancient text sung by the priest or cantor as a large wooden cross or crucifix is brought into Church in today's service. This marks the start of the second part of the Good Friday Liturgy, the Veneration of the Cross, when the faithful come forward to kiss the wood of the cross or the image on it, as a sign of their love for the Crucified Lord. The practice began with the veneration of the relics of the True Cross in Jerusalem and is mentioned in the fourth century pilgrimage account of Egeria. Subsequently this custom was transferred to Rome, when relics of the cross were deposited in the church of Santa Croce, and from there the custom spread even to churches that had no such relics: the very image of Christ crucified should surely bring us to worship.

29<sup>th</sup> March 2024  
Good Friday



'The nail that pierced his hands became for me the key that opened the door so that I might see the will of the Lord... The nail cries out, the wound opens its mouth to cry that truly God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ.' This meditation by St Bernard of Clairvaux on the five holy wounds of Christ uses a play on words. The Latin word for nail is 'clavus' which is very similar to the word for key, 'clavis'. The instruments of Christ's Passion become a key to unlock the deep spiritual meaning behind what is visible to the eyes. The nail prints and Jesus' pierced side are the unmistakable scars of his battle against sin and evil. But these same wounds will be the marks by which St Thomas will recognise the risen Saviour. Joy, beauty and life, die on the Cross and Jesus is locked away in a new tomb. But from the depths of God's bottomless mercy a new light is kindled.

*Today's Gospel: St. John 18:1-19*

### Collect

*Remember your mercies, O Lord, and with your eternal protection sanctify your servants, for whom Christ your Son, by the shedding of his Blood, established the Paschal Mystery. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.*