

## Sermon by Fr Jeremy for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent at All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead

29<sup>th</sup> March, 2020

### Text John 11:1-45 the Theme of the Cry for Help

In May 2000 I experienced a memorable 10 days pilgrimage in the Holy Land with my dear friend Fr Jeremy Winston and his parishioners of St Mary's, Abergavenny. Fr Jeremy the gentle giant who encouraged so many young people during his ministry in Rogerstone, Newport (Where I first met him), St Arvan's near Chepstow, Abergavenny before becoming The Dean of Monmouth in 2001. Sadly, he died not long after his appointment as the Dean and if truth be known many of us still miss his wonderful sense of humour and his incredible cooking skills as well as his sincere faith.

On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2000 our pilgrim party walked the Way of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa. The way of sorrows begins at the Antonia Fortress, winding its way through the Old City and ending at the church of the Holy Sepulchre. After lunch we made our way to Bethany. Here we celebrated the Sunday Eucharist and recalled Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Having walked the stations reflecting on Jesus' suffering I was invited to preach the resurrection at Bethany. Some challenge!

That day as I look back offers a link I believe to the themes today of The thirteenth station of 'Walking the Way Of The Cross' By Stephen Cottrell, Paula Gooder and Philip North, our chosen Lent book and the story of the raising of Lazarus.

Starting with Lazarus and using the creative material from ROOTS the resource for active Eucharistic worship I am inviting you at home to read the following words. ROOTS suggest you play 'Lacrimosa' from Mozart's Requiem as you read.

Lazarus: 'He did not come. I was dying. I think he knew this before the messenger arrived. He had a knack of knowing such things. So why didn't he come? He was our friend, a constant visitor to our home. We loved him and we thought he loved us. At the onset of my last illness, Mary had sent him a message. We knew it would be difficult. He was miles away and had to come on foot. We knew, as well, that there was a price on his head. If he were discovered near Jerusalem, he would be arrested - and there was a watch over our home. Yet, we had never known him refuse a plea for help. And he had power. We'd witnessed some of his miracles. Blind men seeing, the lame walking, some with leprosy cleansed! We'd even heard of the dead being raised, but then again folk exaggerate, and the stories grow in the telling. So, we waited - impatiently, but expectantly. Surely, he would come. The messenger returned. I was growing very weak: Still no Jesus. The last thing I remember was seeing the fear, hurt and disappointment in my sisters' eyes as they watched me slipping away. Then their piercing shrieks as I took my last breath. He had not come.'

Now we move to Stephen Cottrell's reflection on the 13<sup>th</sup> Station 'Why hath thou forsaken me?' Possibly words that I have used more than any other at funerals. Cottrell asks, 'Was this just another fiery preacher (Jesus) with all his big claims, just another lost soul screaming out to God in despair and battering his fists upon the locked door of heaven?' And yet, 'God is in this dying man, and in his dying man experiencing the horrors and the strife and all the fear and isolation, that is the daily currency of sin and death, for now I can even see myself in him. He is dying for me.' Cottrell now concludes so hopefully 'And in sharing this death and in the consequence of sin, .....drawing the sting of it's venom, all of it and for ever, all in loving it, it is defeated.'

St Paul puts it this way (1 Corinthians 15: 55-56) Where O death, is your victory? Where O death is your sting?

The questions asked by the Lazarus text and the suffering Christ coming among us as humans experiencing our suffering leads to the victory of the Cross and New Life. That day in Jerusalem and Bethany on pilgrimage allowed me to experience that hope. And to have confidence that our cry is answered.

In the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Footnote:

Another activity from ROOTS I have adapted for the present times and the COVID 19 crisis . There are many people asking questions like Lazarus and Jesus at this time. Write a short prayer yourself for a person suffering or distressed or for a community or indeed a country. Think about people who have lost loved ones, think about the NHS striving to look after us, think about our own fears. Reflect suggests ROOTS using REM's 'Everybody hurts' or Allegri's 'Miserere'.

Pray in resurrection hope. Amen