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I must confess I'm not very keen on many of the old-style hymns; but my favourite hymn of all is an old one - When I Survey The Wondrous Cross.

I guess, when you meditate and reflect on the Cross of Jesus different music, images, and emotions stir in your minds.

Mark, in his Gospel, is going to tell us the story of how Jesus was Crucified, and he wants us to hold in our minds several pictures, which will give the full meaning of the scene.

In today's Gospel passage he wants, as it were, to sow the seeds of these different pictures; and these seeds will germinate during the rest of the Gospel.

They'll come to full blossom as Jesus celebrates the Last Supper, prays in Gethsemane, stands before the rulers of this world, and finally meets His death - death on a Cross.

Today's Gospel reading is the third time Jesus has warned the Disciples about what's going to happen to Him.

What's difficult for us, and the Disciples, to understand is that it seems to be no surprise to Jesus.

But it's the vocation, which has gripped Him since at least His Baptism in the Jordan when: "A voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." Mk. 1: 11

Jesus is the Suffering Servant, the Saviour, who will suffer and die for the sins of the world, whom we heard Isaiah speak of in the first reading.

“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and [to] make his life an offering for sin.” Is. 53: 10 - 11

And Jesus identifies Himself as the Saviour by referring back to this chapter of Isaiah when He says at the end of today’s Gospel: “I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many.”

Mk. 10: 45

Many, from then until now, have found it incredible that Jesus should have thought of His own death in that deliberate, focused way.

Particularly when we don’t talk about death as it’s a taboo subject in our culture, and do our best to avoid death for as long as possible.

To us, even though we’re steeped in Christianity, it seems ghoulish, even masochistic, for Jesus to seem to seek death in the way He does.

It’s not surprising then that the Disciples find it very scary when Jesus tells them He’s going to Jerusalem to die, and sets His face to do so.

People down the centuries have struggled to find ways to explain Jesus, and His message without having the Cross in the middle of it.

But from Jesus Himself onwards, the claim that He not only died by Crucifixion, but did so as the climax of a thought-out vocation in obedience to His Father, has always been at the centre of the Good News the Church preaches.

Yet so often try to avoid the Cross by turning it into a sanitised object of personal piety, rather than contemplating what it really means for the salvation of the world.

James and John were doing the same by wanting to turn Jesus' journey to Jerusalem into a march to glory in which they'll sit at His right and His left when He reigns as king.

They've heard everything He's said about His suffering, and death, and rising again simply as words without meaning.

Maybe they think Jesus means it's going to be tough, but we're going to come out on top.

But the Cross is not for Jesus, or His Church, a difficult episode to get through on the way to a happy ending.

No. It's God's way of standing worldly power and authority on its head, and that's why He says: "I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many." Mk. 10: 45

He's making the point that His Kingdom turns the world's ideas of power and glory upside down and inside out, and that the Cross isn't just about God forgiving our individual sins.

It's the Lord's chosen way of putting the world, and ourselves to rights, It challenges and subverts all the human political and religious systems, which claim to be the truth, but in fact only succeed in putting another set of humans out on the top of the heap by trampling on others.

The myth of redemptive violence, instead of the truth of the redemptive suffering, and death of Jesus.

All human pride and glory is silenced before Jesus reigning on the Cross.

“Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?

Are you able to be baptised with the baptism of suffering I must be baptised

with?” Mk. 10: 38 Jesus asks James and John when they demand to sit at His

right and His left.

Jesus is going to drink the cup of the wrath of God because His people whom

He created out of love have turned their back on Him.

But Jesus is going to absorb that wrath into Himself for our sake.

God is going to be consumed by His own wrath, not us.

The baptism Jesus talks about looks back to His own Baptism in the Jordan.

His Baptism by John the Baptists irrevocably committed Jesus to His vocation

of being God’s Suffering Servant - the Suffering Saviour - leading us out of

the mire of sin into His Kingdom.

His forthcoming death is also a type of baptism where He goes down beneath

the waters of death, so that sin can, and will, be forgiven; and the source of

all sin - Satan - is defeated forever.

As the Lord spoke through the Prophet Hosea about the coming Saviour:

“I will deliver them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from

death.” Hos. 13: 14

So the brothers James and John have set out their stall to Jesus as candidates to sit at His right and His left in glory.

But when Jesus reigns in His glory, with one on the right, and one on the left, it will be on the Cross.

And the irony is that it won't be James and John reigning with Him but: "Two others, both criminals, [who] were led out with him to be executed with him - one on his right and one on his left." Lk. 23: 32 - 33

Mark's given us a stark picture both of what kingly glory looks like, and of what Jesus' death will mean.

The theme, which runs through his Gospel like a stream of sweet-tasting spring water, is that of following, and being conformed to, Jesus.

As we contemplate, and reflect upon the truth of this, we too may be amazed, horrified, and afraid.

But Jesus is going up to Jerusalem, turning the world's values and power-systems on their heads, setting His face to give His life as a ransom for many.

If we want to receive what He has to offer, we have no choice but to follow Jesus who is: "The way and the truth and the life." Jn. 14: 6

This gentle, strong, loving Jesus who tells us in the Gospel that He: "Came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mk. 10: 45

Jesus: "This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin." Heb. 4: 15

“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Heb. 4: 16

And, having done so, we must follow Jesus to the Cross, and be laid in the Tomb with Him.

Then we can rise with Him, and be led out through its open door into new, and eternal life in Him.