

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jn. 3: 16

If these were the only words of Jesus ever handed down to us, they would be infinitely more than enough to lead us to a personal encounter with Him; to lead us from death to life.

If we drink from the well of these words of the Lord, we’ll find that they: “Become a fresh, bubbling spring within [us], giving [us] eternal life.” Jn. 4: 14

For a few minutes, let’s meditate on that verse together; let’s reflect on God’s love, God’s Son, and our belief.

Our world, which God loves so much, is not some idealised place in His mind; it’s not got to reach a certain standard of goodness before He begins to love it.

This world, with all of its darkness of sin, of its wars, crimes, dishonesty, greed, immorality, and suffering; this is the world God loves so much.

However, He doesn’t want to leave the world mourning and weeping in its vale of tears: He wants to bring healing, and new life to it through the gift of His Son: “So that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” Jn. 3: 14

In today’s first reading we hear of Israel, God’s Chosen People’s, rebellion against the God who gave them life and freedom.

They: “Mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.” 2 Chron. 36: 16

They just wilfully turned deaf ears to the Lord, but Israel’s story isn’t unique: it’s that of every generation; every nation; every person.

And yet, God so loves the world we inhabit, that He sent us His Son.

Paul tells us that the Lord’s saving plan was summed up, and fulfilled in Jesus. He says: “But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.”

Eph. 2: 4

That isn’t Paul giving us a theoretical theological lecture; he’s speaking from his lived-out experience.

He persecuted Christians, and had them killed – think of his being at the forefront when Stephen was stoned to death; then, out of nowhere the risen Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus.

His life was completely changed: he’d done nothing to deserve this gift, but salvation was now his in Jesus.

No wonder he can say: “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.” Eph. 2: 8 because he lived that in the depths of his heart

Like a terrible disease, sin infects our world, and each of us.

We can’t cure ourselves of sin: “It is only by God’s grace that [we] have been saved!” Eph. 2: 5

Jesus says that He: “Must be lifted up, [on the Cross] ^{so} that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.” Jn. 3: 14 – 15

On the Cross, Jesus becomes the only cure to heal us of the sickness of our sin

He draws out the venom of sin in our soul, and transplants it with the grace of new life.

On Good Friday afternoon, we’ll be here to venerate the Cross together; we’ll sing, meditate, and lament over the sufferings of Jesus – and that’s a good thing to do; but will we go home afterwards, just to get on with life unchanged?

You can't understand Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, without the Cross.

Yes, we can say we believe in Jesus; but if we don't take up our cross and follow Him it won't be the life in all its fullness Jesus wants us to experience through His Cross.

Step by step, Jesus prepares us so that we can experience a personal encounter with Him: He prepares us to be 'Cyrenes;' to help Him bear the Cross.

He prepares us, through grace, to accompany Him with our crosses, along His path to Redemption.

To know the Risen Jesus; to know His healing love; to rise to new life with Him, we have to go on the 'Way Of The Cross' with Him.

Not in simply gazing at an image of the Crucified Jesus, but in embracing Him, listening to Him speaking to us from the Cross as St Francis did.

Then, in faithfully following Him, we will begin to be transformed into: "God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it." Eph. 2: 10

So, as you come to the Cross on Good Friday, let it show the horror of sin; but let it also reveal to you the gift of God's love, and the healing forgiveness that is ours in Jesus.

Hold in your hearts the truth that: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jn. 3: 16