

“The Lord has been pleased to crush him with suffering.” Is. 53: 10

As I sat down to prepare this sermon, that verse from the first reading leapt out of the page, and hit me right between the eyes.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will do that with a familiar piece of Scripture to make us think; to make us reflect on, and deepen our relationship with the Lord.

So, how could God the Father have been pleased to crush His Son with suffering?

Let’s think of Abraham, ‘our father in faith.’ of whom

God seems to ask more than anyone could possibly bear.

At times the Lord seems to ask of us more than we can bear too, doesn’t He?

God tells Abraham to: “Take Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there on a mountain I will show you.” Gen. 22: 2

He travels with his son and, on the third day, arrives at the mountain, and prepares to sacrifice Isaac.

At the last minute the Lord stays Abraham’s hand.

There, caught in a bush by its horns, is a ram: the Lord had provided a substitute for Isaac, as He always intended so to do.

On the third day Abraham arrived at Moriah, and the Lord provided a ram to sacrifice in the place of Isaac.

On the third day Jesus rose from the dead; having sacrificed His life: “As a ransom for many.” Mk. 10: 45

Scripture is not a hotchpotch of random stories, and events; it weaves together into a beautiful mosaic of words, which reveal the Saviour to us on every page.

Jesus, who: “Was led like a lamb to the slaughter.” Is. 53: 7 is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

“He was despised and rejected. He was pierced and crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.” Is. 53: 3 & 5

For our salvation; the salving – the healing – of our souls; God the Father: “Laid on him the sins of us all.” Is. 53: 6

Abraham and Isaac are images of the sacrificial love of God the Father, who was willing to sacrifice His Son’s life for us; and of God, the Son, who willingly, and lovingly laid down His life for us on the Cross.

However: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jn. 3: 17

He: “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

And yet sin – our sin – cannot exist alongside our all-holy God; so how does He deal with it?

Is He a wrathful God who inflicts us with suffering out of some sense of perverse pay-back for us having sinned?

No, of course He doesn’t.

If I believed that for one moment, I certainly wouldn’t be a Christian; and I certainly wouldn’t be in the Ordained Ministry in the Lord’s Church either.

Yet I know with a certainty that: “Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.” Eph. 2: 4

However, I’m not saying that sin doesn’t have a consequence for us as individuals; for the Body of Christ, which is the Church; or the family of humanity.

Like a cancer spreading out into the world, sin infects our lives: but not only that; in a profound and mysterious way, it infects the whole of creation.

This build-up of the canker of evil in the world is what Paul describes as: “The mystery of iniquity.” 2 Thess. 2: 7

In reality, what’s at the root of all evil is pride: the Devil’s pride in saying he knew better than God, and rebelling against Him.

We can see this in the pride of nations when they turn away from God, and His just and gentle rule: also, in our little acts of pride when we do the same.

But all supernatural, and human pride and glory, is silenced before Jesus reigning in victory over sin and evil on the Cross.

John, in his great vision in the Book of the Apocalypse of the Church triumphant in Heaven, is told: “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed.” Rev. 5: 5

He turns, and what does he see? “A lamb standing as though it had been slain.” Rev. 5: 6
What a paradox!

How can a lion be a lamb? How can a slain lamb stand?

Jesus, the Lamb of God, can: He took upon Himself the full force of evil, even unto death.

This Jesus, who is as powerful as a lion, yet gentle as a lamb, who dwelt among us: “Not to be served but to serve others, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mk. 10: 45

We’re called at our Baptism to follow Jesus through the door of faith.

To: “Believe with firm certitude that the Lord Jesus has conquered evil and death.”

Pope Benedict XVI: Porta Fidei; 14

Not simply for our own salvation, but that of the entire world, made flesh in the people we meet every day that don’t have: “A personal-passionate friendship with [Jesus].”

Bishop Philip: Pastoral Letter – The Year Of Faith

Faith, like butter, is meant to be spread.

At the beginning of the Year Of Faith, and on this World Mission Sunday, let’s commit ourselves anew, in the Heart of Jesus, to do just that.

And, in so doing, draw ourselves, along with all those we meet along the way, into: “A real life-changing encounter with Jesus, and so to receive the eternal life, love and happiness streaming from His Heart.” Bishop Philip: Pastoral Letter – The Year Of Faith