

The Chaplain writes...*about keeping Holy Week*

When this issue of the Newsletter is in your hands, we shall very nearly be at the most significant time for us as Christian people in the whole year. The time of Holy Week and Easter. A special leaflet, which gives all the times of the special liturgies through Holy Week and for Easter Day along with some explanation of the different services, is available in church and I urge you to take a copy and read it carefully.

Meanwhile, we reflect upon this challenging time. Keeping Holy Week is not a matter of 'just being reminded' of what happened to Christ in the days leading up to his death on the cross and burial in the tomb. Of course, we *do* remember all of that. But as Christian people we are not *spectators* like Roman citizens going to the Forum to enjoy a gladiatorial contest. We are the *participants* in what is before us.

Participants in the sense that the only physical presence that Christ has in our world is through our own physical lives, *in* which and *through* which Christ, the Risen and Glorious Lord, lives. As we live through the mysteries we celebrate each and every Holy Week, they are to take root deeper in our lives, and transform those lives that we may be a more effective presence of the Saving Mystery, Christ himself, in our world.

Our liturgies speak loud and long during Holy Week about Christ's work of salvation, the way in which he offers himself in total loving obedience for God the Father's purposes of healing and restored life for humanity. How does his offering of himself effect such a cure?

Christian people have wrestled with this question since the very beginnings of the Church. One set of answers is that, like looking upon the bronze serpent that Moses created in the desert for the healing of those bitten by snakes, it is enough to let the Cross impact upon us, to let Christ's *example of unconditional love and obedience* so move and change us that we are thereby granted

salvation. The Cross, by this reckoning, gives us a kind of exposure of God and God's love, which we are to imitate.

Another set of answers, at the other end of the 'objectivity-subjectivity' spectrum is to say very starkly that salvation is achieved simply by God's activity in Christ. Nothing else is either necessary or helpful, and the Cross as example is unhelpful as we are unable, out of our own resources, to follow or imitate the loving obedience that we see there.

The New Testament, the earliest wrestling that we have with the Mystery of the Cross and salvation, says both of these things! Which of course must be the case and the Atonement is irreducible to one or the other. Just in the same way as we see in the New Testament language of *sacrifice* being employed to help us understand what was going on there, with its complex overtones. And just as surely as speaking of Christ's death as *sacrifice* the New Testament writers want to affirm that death to be one in which *victim* becomes *victor*.

From this, it is clear that we shall never exhaust the mystery of Christ's work, focussed as it is in his Passion and Cross. Different aspects of this work will come into prominence in our lives at different times but all are indispensable within the Christian community as we kneel in adoration at the foot of the Cross, and contemplate the wonder of our healing, God's wonderful and marvellous work of Redemption.

So as we prepare to keep another Holy Week we remember that we do this in order to let the reality of Christ's victorious self-offering and all that symbolises of God's loving desire for humanity's flourishing take deeper root in our hearts and lives. Our calling as members of Christ's Body is, after all, to continue that work in our world. But first it must take root within us. The Paschal Mystery – Christ's dying and rising – may defy definition. But it is certainly about the remaking of our humanity. The changing of our lives, expressed in our baptism, which is nurtured week by week in the Eucharist.

I wish you all a joyous keeping of Holy Week and a very happy Easter to follow.

Alex Gordon