

Sermon for 22 March 2020

Standing near the cross of Jesus

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' 27 and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19-25-27)

I heard a story of a man struggling to push his trolley through the crowded aisles of a supermarket. Shoppers looked at him with contempt because his trolley was full to capacity. He was confronted angrily. 'How could you be so greedy, so selfish, so ignorant?' He was scorned and abused for having so much. The man with the overflowing trolley was unmoved by all the criticism. At last he spoke up, quietly: "That's all very well, but I work here. It's my job to stack the empty shelves."

Suffering can drive people apart or bring people together. Which will we choose?

Today's Gospel passage shows us the suffering of Jesus, hanging in pain on the cross, the Roman State's instrument of death for condemned criminals.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and some friends, who were powerless to end his suffering. They could not touch Jesus, but they stood together.

Out of his suffering, Jesus spoke to them. Among his dying words, he showed his mother Mary and disciple John the prospect of greater closeness. It was less a command than a revelation of what was within their grasp. Mary would become a mother to his disciple. John would become a son to Mary. They would dwell together. They could share their lives as a household in a home. If they chose, out of their sadness and grief they could build a future together.

During this present crisis we have an opportunity to rediscover our humanity and to stand with one another. We have a chance to relearn and recalibrate what it means to be a civilized society.

Standing near the cross of Jesus today, tomorrow, and at each moment, we can find ourselves held in the gaze of the compassion of God. How will we respond? We have a choice.

As St Francis of Assisi in Italy is said to have prayed:

It is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.