

Lent with Ruth Burrows and Sister Wendy Beckett

HOLY WEEK: WHAT CAN WE DO EXCEPT RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE?



Diego Velázquez, "Christ Crucified"

If we want to know God, Reality, Bedrock and Ground, Absolute Origin, ineffable Mystery, that in which we and all that is exist as tiny fish in an infinite ocean, we must look at Jesus crucified. Holding up the cross, bidding us gaze into that bleeding, humiliated face, the Holy Spirit's focus is not first and foremost on suffering, or even on sin and its consequences, but on a love that is absolute, "out of this

world," "other," "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived."

We must gaze and gaze with fullest attention and then affirm: this is God; this is what God is really like. Through this vision we have the certainty of what is beyond our comprehension, that God is love and nothing but love, and that he is love to and for us. It is not enough merely to affirm God's loving interest and care - one need not be a Christian to hold that sincerely. What we see in Jesus is a Self-gift on God's part that is the fullest content of love. God gives not gifts but God's own Self.

The principal labour of the Christian is to believe that divine love is the breadth and length and height and depth, and that there is simply nothing above, below or beyond it. It is our home; it enfolds us and is our utmost security both in this life and in death and beyond. We are speaking of faith, not of feelings or intellectual grasp. For faith means a blind trust in and surrender to the God of love and this love is too great for our human heart and mind.

Ruth Burrows, *Essence of Prayer*, 46-47.

Ruth Burrows on Holy Week...

"Here we are at the door of Holy Week. What can we do except receive, let be? All is too much for our understanding. We are children after all."



Duccio di Buoninsegna, "Entry into Jerusalem"

Palm Sunday summons us to align ourselves either with Jesus or against him. It would seem that even to say "against" is ridiculous: are we not his followers?

Well, perhaps we are not. Perhaps we are like the Jerusalemites who welcomed him when he seemed the Messiah who would magic away their problems, but rejected him when he turned out to be a Saviour who carried a cross and died upon it, and asked those who loved him to do the same.

Cheers and acclamations can pass as belief. But it is actions that count. Lent asks us to scrutinise, calmly and in the presence of God, what direction our actions have led us in and will lead us. Are we directed towards God? Or towards ourselves? Do we forgive? Do we pray? Do we try to be patient? The list is endless.

Jesus offers his blessing to anybody who is sincere and seeks him. But what blessing can he give, however much he wants to, if we are only going through the motions, like the "good people" in Duccio's painting? Better to be a donkey than a Christian who only mouths the words!

Sister Wendy Beckett, *The Art of Faith*, 25.

For reflection...

- Is there any aspect of Sister Wendy's reflection that particularly challenges you or tugs at your heart? What is your response to that challenge or tug?
- How about the painting: if you had to locate yourself within the scene depicted, where do you think you would be? Why?