

## Good Friday 2020

### God's merciful love in Jesus.

I think I should preface these few words, by saying that a very dear friend of mine died yesterday, and that this experience has shaped what I am going to say.

In common with so many people at this time, my friend's family were not able to be with her when she died, and I know that will make their grief more painful. But like the other 881 people who died yesterday, she was not alone, the NHS staff, Carers and Hospice Staff were there ... those I described last night as, *'the Saints next door'*.

Today, we can pray for all those who stand at the foot of the cross, and share the passion of the Lord, those who feel a sword pierce their soul, those who are in union with Our Lady of Sorrows.

Alongside the Mother of Jesus stands the disciple Jesus loves. At the cross, when the hour of Jesus has come, Jesus employs revelatory language, here (behold) your son. Jesus speaks to his mother and asks her to see the Beloved Disciple and accept him as her son. Then he turns to the Beloved Disciple and asks him to see the Mother of Jesus and to accept her as his mother. By his declaration, Jesus forms a new family at the Cross (mother and son).

The formation of this new family at the cross provides a nucleus for the community of believers, the Church. The Johannine community looked to the Beloved Disciple as their eyewitnesses, and their link to Jesus. Their new status as a Church began at the cross. Therefore, the words of Jesus are more properly understood as an ecclesiology of the Cross. The mystery of the Cross and the mystery of the Church are united. The *'saints next door'* are certainly part of God's holy people.

Today, we have been offered a new prayer, as part of the Solemn Intercessions. Such changes happen only very rarely. This prayer for the afflicted in the time of pandemic, intercedes to God, for the sick, for those who care them, for their families and those who have died. It concludes: *'that we all may find comfort in God's merciful love'*.

Suffering and death are not new. This is the hour! This is hour of suffering, of the passion and death, of glorification, leading to the resurrection. This is the hour when we are called to stand alongside Mary, our Mother, with our saints next door, as beloved disciples of the Lord and see in his pierced and broken body, new hope.

We are called to see in the death of Jesus, the sign of God's merciful love, upon which we will rebuild and renew our lives – forgiven, renewed, restored and reconciled to God – through the life and ministry of his Church. We know that even in this darkest hour, new life flows from the cross, into the mystery of the resurrection, because by the death of Jesus, God's merciful love is accomplished.