**Good Frid*ay Mark 15:21-41***

***The Crucifixion of Jesus***

*They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.*

*It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, ‘The King of the Jews.’ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!’ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah,the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.*

***The Death of Jesus***

*When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘Listen, he is calling for Elijah.’ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.’ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’*

*There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.*

In the name of the One God, Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit. Dear friends, this Good Friday is one like no other. Over the past few years, I have experienced Good Friday in Spain where there are extraordinary processions at which thousands of people gather to witness the carrying of the cross bearing the crucified figure of Jesus. Barefooted penitents with their heads covered trudge in front of the cross. Drums beat as the procession makes its way through the streets of Madrid and similarly in many other Spanish cities and villages. The whole spectacle is deeply moving, but this year Spain is in lock down. The streets will be silent. And of course, this situation will be played out across the world- empty churches, empty streets and the world in isolation as we contend with the danger of infection.

But the story we tell every Good Friday has not gone away. It is the story of the God who came to us as a Bethlehem infant, who spent his life proclaiming the love of God for all the earth and who has now been put to the most cruel death upon a cross. And in this death, Jesus experiences terrible suffering, such that he calls out in desperation, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ : ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’. How lonely he must have felt. In what agony he must have been. One thing we can be sure of, is that the God who has came amongst us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, has truly understood human suffering. God has suffered with us and continues to suffer with us wherever there is pain or death or misery in this world.

It seems that we do have difficult times ahead of us. There may be anxiety, loneliness, financial suffering, sickness or for some, even death. Perhaps today, this very strange way of experiencing Good Friday in isolation may give us a little window into the loneliness of Jesus upon the cross on that terrible day outside the walls of Jerusalem. And of course, because we live as people knowing of the resurrection, we know that the death of Jesus was not the end of our relationship with God. On the contrary, God is intimately tied to us in love, God shares in our suffering and as the resurrected Christ explained to the disciples, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will be sent “to teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you”.(John 11:21)

We are living in a difficult time; an uncertain time- we are living through a lonely Good Friday, and yet the God who was given birth in a shepherds stable, who loved, who welcomed the stranger, who healed the broken and the sick, and who has been put to death in such a cruel fashion, -that God remains with us now. That is the God who comes to us in the kindness of strangers, in the self-sacrificing love of nurses and doctors who care for the sick, in the care of one person for another and when all is said and done, it is the God who will create a ’new heaven and a new earth’ (Revelation 21: 1) and who out of great love for this creation, ‘will make all things new.’ (Revelation 21:5)

May God bless you in the days ahead.