

MEDITATION FOR PALM SUNDAY at 8am | 25.03.18

2nd Reading: (Philippians 2: 5-11) Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As so often, it was a brief conversation that set off a train of thoughts as I began to prepare for today, Palm Sunday. And the conversation was about Facebook – the biggest of the social media platforms. You can't have failed to have heard about the criticism that Facebook (and similar institutions) have been asleep while the personal information they hold on all of us has been sent on to other organisations – for both political and commercial ends.

The conversation was with a young mum, sharing her reluctance to use Facebook even for something as exciting as the arrival of her young son. And the discussion revolved around who one would want to share such information with. Family: of course. Close friends: yes. But people you were barely in touch with? Perhaps not.

And then there has been the story this weekend of a Downing Street political adviser who, in explaining his actions, inadvertently compromised the sexuality of his Pakistani former partner – with hugely negative repercussions.

With tabloids daily exposing what everybody and anybody is up to, is it any wonder that there is a new energy for protecting our privacy – from the holding of personal data to credit ratings, from what we buy at the supermarket to what websites we visit?

The fear, always, is that people will not understand – or may purposefully misinterpret – the reasons for our choices. Or they may wish to manipulate the information they have gathered to bring additional pressure on us.

It isn't enough - to take the line from a recent crime drama set in the 1970s - that *you should tell the policeman everything – unless, course, you have something to hide...* There have been too many horror stories where such gullibility has led to people being taken for a ride. **We genuinely don't feel able to tell everybody everything.**

And yet that is exactly what we see in Jesus. This passage from Philippians reminds us that Jesus is God. However pitiful a figure he cuts as he carries his cross to Calvary, *this is our God, the servant King*. He was there at the very beginning of creation; he and the Father are one – in everything. God the Father has entrusted everything and everyone into his hands. He is the one who cures and sick and brings the dead back to life. The Gospel stories are about how, when Jesus is there, the barrier between heaven and earth vanishes. *All glory, laud and honour – to thee Redeemer king*. The crowds recognised something about him that was not present in anyone else – ever.

And then: and then he sets his sights in a completely different direction. He gives up all his abilities to see the future as a prophet, all his healing gifts as a priest, all his powers as a King. On this journey he gives away everything – including his rights to privacy and control.

Every part of his dignity – as Son of God and indeed, as a human being - is stripped away and we can see everything. Literally. This isn't just that *the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head* when he is tired. This criminal – who once held thousands enthralled by his words and by his compassion – now loses control over everything.

And yet when that happened, the strange thing is that the people there 'did not see'. His broken body was there for all to stare at – but they did not have the faintest idea what they were looking for. Rather like going into a museum of contemporary art when the canvas in front of us makes no sense, the way in which Jesus took the form of a slave, allowing us all to see everything about him, in a strange way, was more confusing than ever.

The world did not understand Jesus and it still doesn't.

Because his whole motivation, his whole desire was to show us how to be open and obedient to the will of God. This was no cheap magic show: the death of Jesus was about atonement – at-one-ment – with God's plans for the world. Nothing, Jesus showed us, nothing was get in the way of living and loving 'God's way', making all the sacrifices necessary to that we can pray with total sincerity: *thy will be done ... on earth as it is in heaven*.

We live in a world of secrets, of manipulation of information, of subterfuge, shadows and suspicion. This Holy Week, we Christians can see something different: what happens when God's Son has everything taken from him - and still loved those who abused him. With the invitation, of course, for us to try to do the same.