



## Good Friday

### Homily

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**Friday, 15 April, 2022  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother "Woman, this is your son" (Jn 19:25-26).*

At the foot of the cross Mary comes to understand fully the words spoken to her when she and Joseph carried their newborn child into the temple to have him consecrated to the Lord. *"You see this child,"* said the prophet Simeon to Mary, *"He is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul, too, - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare"* (Luke 2:34,35).

As we gather this afternoon to solemnly recall the passion and death of Jesus, the image of Mary at the foot of the cross invites us to remember, and to pray for, all those mothers who are grieving the loss of their sons and daughters, of their husbands, and of their brothers and sisters, in the dreadful conflict which is engulfing Ukraine. Like Mary the souls of these mothers are being pierced by a terrible sword of suffering as they see those they love suffer and die. And, of course, they are not alone. Evil, and the suffering it causes, does not discriminate. Everyone caught up in this terrible conflict is, in one way or another, a victim of evil.

How many people in Ukraine must be crying out in anguish, as Jesus himself did on the cross, *my God, my God why have you abandoned me?* (Mk 15:34). And indeed, how many of us in moments of failure, of shame, or of great suffering and even despair, might have found the same thought in our hearts and perhaps on our lips. Why is God allowing this to happen to me? Why does not God put an end to this terrible suffering? Has the Christian faith got it all wrong when it assures us that God loves us? Does God really care about me or about those I love?

It is right that we should ask these questions. Jesus himself cried out in anguish as he experienced a sense of God abandoning him. We should not expect, as his disciples, to be protected from the suffering that marked his own life. He had warned his first disciples about this and he says to us, as he said to them, *"if you wish to be my disciples you must take up your cross and follow me"* (Mark 8:34). This is not a promise of a care-free life.

One of the most precious gifts which the Lord has given us is the gift of freedom. It is this gift, indeed, which makes us human. We are not simply driven by instinct: we are able to choose. But



our own story and the wider story of our society, and indeed the long story of humanity, reveals the simple and dreadful truth that we often misuse our freedom and in doing so bring great suffering and distress to ourselves, to those who are dear to us, and to the wider communities of which we are apart. We see this so starkly and so tragically in the war unfolding in Ukraine. But we see it too, in different ways, in the violence which explodes in our streets and suburbs from time to time, in the coward punch which destroys an innocent person's life, in the horror of the sexual abuse of the young, in the reality of domestic violence which poisons the lives of so many innocent people, especially women and children, and in countless other ways.

God did not intend for us to live this way but from the very beginnings of the human story we have turned away from God and in doing so have lost sight of what it means to be truly human. We have misused the beautiful gift of freedom which could have made the lives of others so rich but which so often, through our choices, diminishes their lives so greatly.

While this is true of all of us it was not true of Jesus. He never turned away from God and never sought to do or be anything other than God was calling him to do and be. It is the great mystery of Good Friday that, precisely because Jesus was always faithful to God, he became a victim of those who had either never known God, or had turned away from God, or who honoured God only with their lips but not truly in their hearts, where it really counts.

This is the source of so much of the suffering which dominates our world and our own lives. Jesus experienced the full weight of all this suffering - he took on, in fact, the full burden and the consequences of human sin - and it was this burden which led him to cry out to God in anguish. But, of course, God had not abandoned him. In his suffering, and through his suffering, Jesus was led to something deeper. Saint Luke tells us that at the very end "*Jesus cried out in a loud voice ... 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit'*" and, says Saint Luke, "*with these words he breathed his last*" (Luke 23:46).

Even though Jesus did feel as if God had abandoned him, at a deeper level he knew that God was indeed with him, suffering with him, loving him, protecting him and leading him through his suffering and death to peace and to the fullness of life.

God is present in the agony of the Ukrainian people. And just as she stood with Jesus as he breathed his last, so Mary, his mother, also stands with the Ukrainian people – God's people - as they become the victims of the evil and the cruelty and the godlessness of their attackers and oppressors.

When we become victims of the cruelty, or the indifference, or the rejection of others, and are perhaps tempted to wonder if God has abandoned us, let us unite ourselves with the Lord Jesus, so that he can lead us from the sense of abandonment to that deep faith that will enable us to believe that the Lord is also present with us in our distress and to say, as he did, "*Father, into your hands I entrust my life, my spirit, all those I love, all those who are in so much need of you*".