

A Reflection on the Passion of Jesus by Fr Jose Pagola

Jesus foresaw the possibility of a violent end. He wasn't naïve. He knew what the consequences would be if he insisted on continuing with the project of the kingdom of God. It was impossible to seek so radically a life of dignity for the poor and for sinners without provoking a reaction from those who had no interest in any change.

Jesus is certainly not contemplating suicide. He is not seeking to be crucified. He did not want anyone else or himself to suffer. He spent his life fighting suffering wherever he found it: in sickness, in injustice, in sin, or in despair. So he does not seek death, but neither does he shrink from it.

He will continue to welcome sinners and the excluded, even though his behavior causes annoyance in the temple. If they condemn him to death, he will die like a criminal or like anyone they exclude, but his death will confirm what he stood for during his whole life: his trust in a God who does not exclude anyone from his forgiveness. He will continue to proclaim the love of God for the 'least', by identifying himself with the poorest and the most despised people in the empire, even at the risk of being a nuisance to the entourage of the Roman governor.

If one day they execute him by nailing him to the cross, a punishment reserved for slaves, he will die like a despised slave, but his death will seal forever his fidelity to a God who protects them. Full of the love of God, he will continue to bring 'salvation' to all who suffer from injustice and sickness; he will be a refuge to all who are excluded by society and religion; he will grant the unmerited forgiveness of God to sinners and lost souls incapable of returning his friendship. This attitude which inspired his entire life would also bring about his death.

It is for this reason that we Christians are so powerfully attracted to the cross. We kiss the feet of the crucified Lord, we raise our eyes to him, and we listen to his last words, because in his crucifixion we see the final act of service to the project of the Father and the supreme act of God giving his Son out for love for the whole of humanity.

It is unbecoming to turn Holy Week into a popular show or a tourist attraction. For the followers of Jesus to celebrate the passion and death of the Lord is a demonstration of heartfelt gratitude to, and joyful worship of, the incredible love of God, and a call to live like Jesus in solidarity with all crucified victims.