

It is Maundy Thursday and the vigil has just started. The lady chapel is quiet, almost dark, although no-one has yet put the lights on. I have brought my Bible intending to meditate on the passion story as I take my turn at the vigil, but it is too dark to read. I look around for something to focus my mind and lead my thoughts and prayers. There is nothing. The altar has been stripped of all but the plain gilt cross and the two candles burning at either side. All around me there is silence and darkness, just enough light to see the simple cross made of precious metal. It is a thing of beauty.

But the cross was not beautiful, not smooth & polished. It was a rough hewn sturdy ugly timber beam, an instrument of torture. Why do we represent it as a work of art? Have we sanitised the suffering and the ugliness? Does this shiny metal shape have anything to say to us? Would not the rough wooden cross resonate more fully with our broken lives? Life is full of suffering and a suffering Saviour who offers his love, his compassion and his forgiveness surely has more to offer our damaged world than the nice clean Sunday best of our normal 'religion'. I spend a few more minutes staring at the cross which seems increasingly alien from my life, and my understanding of my Saviour.

Then someone enters the church, letting a draught in through the open door. The candles beside the Lady Chapel altar flicker wildly, and are reflected in the shiny surface of the gilt cross, temporarily blinding me. And in those few seconds everything changes! In the dazzle, my inward eye suddenly sees heaven open with the blazing light of the glory of the Risen Lord. It is as if all heaven shouts 'Alleluiah!'

The door is closed, the candle flames resettle and I am left looking at a plain gilt cross on an empty altar. Not a symbol of torture but a symbol of new life, resurrection life. The suffering, the torture & the death transformed by the power of God into the glory of Easter Day. The power of God at work then, at work now, transforming my life, transforming the world, giving us a share in the glory of the Risen Christ.

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*      Romans 8:18