

## Reflection for Good Friday

In 2004 Mel Gibson produced a two-hour epic film entitled 'The Passion of the Christ.' It highlighted and lingered on the cruel tortures and sadistic pain inflicted on Jesus during the last twelve hours of his earthly life. When it came out, I was asked what I thought of the film and I recall remarking that it was far more graphic, brutal and gorier, than any of the four gospel accounts, dwelling as it did on the physical pain, anguish and torment suffered by Jesus. Indeed, at the time, it came in for some heavy criticism for the extreme violence it portrayed.

The gospels record the suffering of Jesus in a very matter of fact and measured way. An example of this is the sentence, "*then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and struck him with their hands.*" That sentence, that scene, was given twenty-six very graphic minutes in the film! Rather than dwelling on the pain endured by Jesus, the gospels, give much more space to Peter's triple denial that he even knew Jesus; to the exchange between Jesus and Caiaphas the high priest; to Pilate's doubts and dithering and to his conversation with Jesus on the nature of his kingship; to the casting of lots for the clothing of Jesus, and to Jesus entrusting his mother to the care of his beloved disciple.

The passion narratives of the four gospels are not so much a record of the brutality and the suffering inflicted upon Jesus as the story of the Jewish nation, and mankind in general, rejecting the Saviour whom God had sent to them. They speak of God's self-giving, of his sacrifice for an ungrateful humanity undeserving of his love. And they are meant to make us think, to draw us into the story. The gospels want us to ask ourselves questions. Are we, like Judas, capable of betraying Jesus? Like Peter, do we deny that we even know the man? Like Pilate do we fail to understand the nature of Jesus's kingdom and dismiss the truth for conspiracy theories and fake news? Like the crowds braying for Christ's blood have we no king but Caesar? Or do we have the backbone of the three Marys – his mother Mary, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene – who with "*the disciple Jesus loved*" stood faithfully by the foot of the cross?

The passion gospels we have heard this week aren't simply accounts of the sufferings of Jesus but descriptions of the love of God for us and of our rejection of his love. They are also invitations to repent in sorrow for our sins, to amend our lives and to arise with Jesus to a new way of living.