

Holy Week Reflection – Tuesday 7th April

Ann has chosen for today's reflection J. S. Bach's, 'O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß', which, when translated becomes: 'O mankind, mourn your great sins' and is the first line of a beautiful chorale; part of Bach's work, St. Matthew Passion. The text itself comes from a Lutheran Passion hymn written by Sebald Heyden in 1530 and when fully translated, the text reads...

*O mankind, mourn your great sins,
for which Christ left His Father's bosom
and came to earth;
from a virgin pure and tender
He was born here for us,
He wished to become our Intercessor,
He gave life to the dead
and laid aside all sickness
until the time approached
that He would be offered for us,
bearing the heavy burden of our sins
indeed for a long time on the Cross.*

I hope that you have had a chance to listen to these amazing words set to music so beautifully by Bach. Within the whole of the Passion, this chorale is set at the end of Part 1; just after the disciples had left Jesus. The timing of these words, just as Jesus was left alone, speaks deeply into the heart of his solo mission. He *alone* could live a full human life and remain God. He *alone* could live without sin and fulfil the law to perfection. He *alone* could be the intercessor between sinful humanity and our heavenly Father.

So much of Christ's passion is in the context of other people; his disciples, the women who loved him and cared for him, the crowds as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to say nothing of the Jewish and Roman authorities before whom he stood. Yet, despite the presence of so many people, Holy Week tracks a journey of increasing mental and spiritual isolation. His disciples fell asleep as he prayed and they fled after his arrest, with Peter later betraying Jesus. God's Messiah was sent to earth to reconcile humanity to God. Only he could do this and do it alone.

This chorale speaks of the very reason for Jesus' sacrifice – our sin. Each Lent, we take time out to reflect on the aspects of our lives that separate us from God, but this text communicates so clearly that Jesus came to bear those sins. He, himself, was offered on the cross, not us. How do we respond to such love and sacrifice? Isaac Watts also reflected on this in the Passiontide hymn, 'When I survey the wondrous cross.' His final lines read, 'Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.'

This passion text makes it clear that Jesus gave up everything for us in bearing our sins and interceding with his Father for us. Now more than ever before, let us learn just what it really means to repent of our sins and give Jesus, our souls, our lives, our all.