

I place all my trust in you my God

Those of us who went on the parish away day at Mount St Bernard's last Monday enjoyed a happy and prayerful time together preparing for Holy Week. We looked at the various people present at the events of that momentous week and in particular we pondered their place in the passion story and considered what was being asked of them. Two people we picked out for consideration were Martha and Mary who feature in today's gospel. The centre piece of the story is the raising of Lazarus but we mustn't allow the story to rush ahead. Every verse of this narrative is relevant as it moves towards its climax because it is within the ongoing exchange between Jesus and Martha and Mary that a vitally important understanding of our own discipleship and relationship with Jesus is revealed and made apparent.

One of the most precious things we can achieve as Christians is to allow the encounters that take place in the gospels between Jesus and the various individuals he meets, to become our encounters too. We are able to do this because we can see that in these special moments Jesus picks up on all the things that concern us and he uses them as a gateway into another understanding. We can see this beautifully in the last two gospel stories which we have read: the woman at the well and the man born blind. Both these two persons have their own issues and concerns which they carry with them. A chance encounter with a woman at a well and an unexpected public appearance for a blind man have caused thoughts, emotions, prejudices and anxieties to be plundered and overcome through a series of reflections which probe beyond the superficial and go down into the depths of our motivations, in other words, to where we ask the innermost questions about ourselves. Today the question asked is about our death and the whole encounter takes place at the graveside.

It is as if Jesus himself has forced this moment upon Martha and Mary. His decision not to attend to Lazarus at the bedside has raised questions that cannot go unasked, but it is the question which Jesus asks that must be confronted and answered: *Do you believe?* In a way everything has been leading up to this question and it is only in the moment of greatest distress that its impact hits home because death is the moment of separation, the moment when what has bound us physically to the one we love is broken and we ask how is this moment made understandable.

To answer the question requires an act of faith, an act of trust which is what Jesus asks of Martha and Mary and what he asks of us. It is the most difficult question we are asked because we don't know the answer since our own experience cannot probe the immensity of its demand. So how are we meant to respond? We know that we won't witness a Lazarus event, we know that the one whom we loved has died and the shock and the grief is unbearable and standing at the graveside becomes our cross of sorrows that weighs heavily upon our shoulders, yet the cross is where we are called stand and it is where our trust is most acutely examined. The answer lies in knowing that into this realm of the unknowing and the uncertain Jesus too will go, putting his trust in God and that his ultimate victory over death and our participation in it, is part of our history.