

The Mind of Christ

One of the enduring questions which keeps being asked is whether it is possible to know the mind of Christ? We read in today's Gospel how Jesus predicted that he was going to suffer, be put to death, and then to rise again. Was this thought something which he had constantly in his mind from the very outset or was it something which he came to realise as an inevitable consequence of his own preaching and teaching? And what did he himself understand by the phrase *and to be raised up on the third day*? How did this notion form in his mind? We may think that such questions are not appropriate ones, as if somehow simply to ask them brings about suspicion in terms of our motives and intentions. But when you are confronted as we are today, with the question which Jesus himself asks of each one of us, then we are bound to explore every aspect of the question simply in order to be honest about the veracity of our reply.

What then can we say about knowing the mind of Christ? Well if you set out to teach people about the kingdom of God and what that means, and if you do it in a way that offers an understanding of the love of God as the epitome of the human experience, then you begin to deliver a vision that places at the centre of this kingdom a new and different reality. And the image of this new reality doesn't thereby comply with the hierarchy of leadership that derives its status through authority and power. Rather this leadership derives its respect through service. I think that if Jesus had any image in his mind as to how this transforming of society as recognised through the inauguration of a new messianic age was being established through him, then it was in the image of Isaiah's Suffering Servant that he saw his mission.

Jesus was a great observer of both people and of the times in which he lived. He was able to weigh up what his deeds and actions, as well as his words evoked and meant. Yes the miracles or mighty deeds he performed evoked a sense of authority, but in the parables he told, he expressed a deep understanding of both relationship and conscience, and the rupture that existed between the two. He observed all of this and found in people a yearning for the tenderness and compassion of God's love as made plain in the reality of broken and crippled lives, rather than in the ritual and ceremony of unbending and rigid religious legalism. To open people's eyes to this he made plain that what really mattered was recognising that God lives in the hearts of people and not in the sanctuary of a Temple.

Praying the words of Isaiah must have filled Jesus with awe. Almost every phrase which speaks of the Suffering Servant connects in a way which enlightens and illuminates the words deeds of Jesus and I think it informs us in a very real way as to how he saw himself. His mission was to bring God's love into the everyday events of people's lives and ultimately this set people against him because it broke down norms and structures by liberating people from what had previously been enslaving. Ultimately it brought him to his death *as the man of sorrows, despised and one for whom we had no regard* just as Jesus himself had predicted it would. As for *being raised up on the third day* such a notion is present too:

*After the ordeal he has endured he will see the light and be content. By his knowledge,
the upright one, my servant will justify many by taking their guilt on himself. (Is
C53 v 11)*

Jesus knew the answer to the question he asked. He was content in his own mind that God would vindicate him. Can we respond like Peter?