

The Triumph of the Cross 14<sup>th</sup> September 2014

## The Cross

On Sunday evening here at St Thomas More we are holding a candlelight vigil for the suffering and persecuted people of the world. I would encourage as many of you who are able to come to Church between 6.30 and 7.30 pm to light a candle for peace. If you can stay for the full hour that would be wonderful, if you can come for just five minutes then please do so. Furthermore may I encourage our young families to come along and bring your children so that they too can light a candle and take their place among those witnessing and praying for peace and reconciliation in the world.

The cross stands as the most powerful witness in the world to suffering and persecution, and yet for Jesus the cross is the movement towards which his life's pathway draws him. Its significance therefore can not be argued on human terms alone. We have heard in the gospels of the last few weeks how central this issue is. How between Jesus and his disciples, a gulf in understanding the cross opens up. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter is a radical exposition of this gulf. Jesus lays before his friends the purpose of what he is about, and they want to stop him. It is in the context of this gulf and the space that it creates, that the importance of the cross gains its meaning for us. Jesus always knew what the cross meant; we are still trying to come to understand it.

When we look up at the cross we feel the pathos, the futility, the anger that comes from all human suffering and persecution. As Christians we translate those feelings and look to place them at the centre of that event; the cruel execution of an innocent man who in the words of his human adjudicator had done nothing wrong and ask: why and how. Yet it seems that we are unable or unwilling to attempt any crossing of that gulf so as to take us out of the human sphere and on towards that one that Jesus inhabits. Jesus does not hold that against us, but he did make the point; *if any one wants to be a follower of mine let him take up his cross and follow me*, and this is the point we have yet to grasp.

Today our world is ablaze with horrendous events and happenings; in Gaza and Israel, in Ukraine, in Africa, in Syria, in Iraq, the list could go on and on. Day after day we see and hear reports of terrible torture, violence and death, and for some this is the way the world is, but must it always be so? Is the cross the *ikon* that tells us: this is what we are like; this is what the powerful do to the weak, period. Surely not. Which is why, in our understanding of the cross, we are called to take that same pathway Jesus took, even though we fail fully to comprehend it. The cross, in the mind of Jesus, is about something much deeper than a meek surrender to earthly powers, after all Jesus told Pilate: *you would have no power over me unless it were given you from above*.

For Jesus the cross is the act of absolute obedience to the Father's will and is therefore completely immersed in the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father, a love which has no bounds and knows no ends. How does this play out in a world where hatred and evil can destroy us and where justice and dignity can be so easily trampled underfoot? The cross does so by bringing our fallen nature to its threshold, and by exposing us to look on the *one whom they have pierced* so that we may be redeemed and reborn in the sacramental life that flows from the side of the crucified saviour.