

A MESSAGE FROM FATHER NICK – 3

A suitable companion for Holy Week?

Interestingly enough, our most famous early Christian pilgrims are women. There's St Helen of course, the mother of Constantine, who is credited with finding the true cross and other relics of the Passion. But we have another travelling hero too, and at this time of compulsory seclusion she can help to remind us of the journey we are all still making.



Egeria, or Etheria as she is sometimes called, seems to have been a woman in religious life who lived in Spain or Gaul. She was also an intrepid person. Between 381 and 384 AD she visited the Holy Land and wrote an account of her experience for a circle of women friends at home. *Egeria's Travels*, as it came to be known, is a priceless historical document. It is from this that we learn about the liturgy of Holy Week (often called "the Great Week") as it was then practised in Jerusalem.

This did not have a finally fixed form, but of course much was made of the link between events and the actual sites of Jesus' last days. Describing the veneration of the cross on Good Friday, Egeria adds a fascinating detail:

"The bishop's chair is placed on Golgotha...and he takes his seat. A table is placed before him with a cloth on it, the deacons stand round, and there is brought to him a gold and silver box containing the holy Wood of the Cross. It is opened, and the Wood of the Cross and the Title are taken out and placed on the table.

As long as the holy Wood is on the table, the bishop sits with his hands resting on either end of it and holds it down, and the deacons around him keep watch over it. They guard it like this because what happens now is that all the people, catechumens as well as faithful, come up one by one to the table. They stoop down over it, kiss the Wood, and move on. But on one occasion (I don't know when) one of them bit off a piece of the holy Wood and stole it away, and for this reason the deacons stand round and keep watch in case anyone dares to do the same again."

A Prayer And A Message Of Gratitude

From Archbishop George Stack

To All In The Health Service Who Care For Us In These Difficult Times

In many churches and chapels you will see on the walls “Stations of the Cross”. We use these images especially during Lent and Passiontide to meditate on the journey Jesus makes carrying his cross to Calvary. These devotions are especially significant at this time as you care for so many of our brothers and sisters in carrying the cross of sickness, and even death, during this COVID 19 pandemic.

Three significant people who accompanied Jesus on that painful journey. They speak to us on the journey we are forced to make today. The first was Mary his mother, and our mother too. “At The Cross Her Station Keeping” as the ancient hymn “Stabat Mater” puts it. Mary is the model for all who stand, and watch, and care for those who are in any need whatsoever.

The second is Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross. He probably did not know the significance of what he was doing. Yet his example comes down through the ages as a model and support as you reach out and help those who need to be carried through this burden of sickness.

Veronica wiped the bloodied face of Jesus and, by tradition, that image was printed on the towel she used. Her tenderness in the face of terrible suffering remains an inspiration to all who relieve the pain and suffering of those who rely on staff “binding up their wounds”.

There is no doubt that each one of you, through your professionalism, compassion and courage, extend the healing hands of Jesus to the sick for whom you care. Often this is done at risk to your own health. I write to say you are not forgotten and for your healing hands we are all truly grateful. Even though at times exhausted and even fearful, you are supported by the prayers, love and admiration of so many people in our homes, churches and beyond. Please care for yourselves and your families in the same professional way you care for your patients.

Mary, Simon and Veronica did extraordinary works of mercy at a time of great confusion and pain to themselves. Compassion is a powerful word which is as meaningful today as it was on the road to Calvary two thousand years ago. We thank you for travelling with us on this painful journey.

On Thursday last Pope Francis blessed the peoples of the world from St. Peter’s Square.

Speaking of you he said:

“It is the life of the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people who do not appear in newspapers and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in

these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, cleaners, caregivers and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. The Lord needs these companions on his way of the cross. You who are on the front lines of this pandemic are involved in these decisive times before us”.

Urbi et Orbi

A PRAYER FOR EVERYONE AT THIS DIFFICULT TIME

God of healing and of hope

In Jesus you meet us in our places of pain and fear.
Look with mercy on those who have contracted the new virus,
On any who are vulnerable, and on all who feel in danger.
Through this time of global concern, by your Holy Spirit
Bring out that which is best in us, not what is worst.
Make us more aware of our interdependence on each other,
And of the strength that comes from being one body in you.
Through Christ our wounded healer. Amen.

(Dr. Sam Wells of St. Martin in the Field)