



**Good Friday 2019**

**Homily**

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**Friday 19 April 2019  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Every time I listen to the reading of the Passion, I find myself asking why Jesus had to die. As I do, I am not thinking so much of the more profound question of how his suffering and death free us from our sins in fulfilment of God's will. That itself is a profound mystery which perhaps can only be understood through a special gift of God. It is a mystery we accept in faith.

Rather, in asking the question of why Jesus had to die, I am thinking more of the disturbing paradox that a man whose whole life was one of love, of self-giving, and of peace, should provoke so much bitterness, opposition and hatred.

It is true that some of the religious leaders of Jesus' time found it impossible to reconcile his teaching and his way of acting with their interpretation of their own religious traditions. It is true also that Jesus seems to have been the victim of a political power-play between some of the Jewish leaders and their Roman occupiers. But none of this can quite explain the frenzy of violence and hatred which surrounded his arrest, his torture and his crucifixion.

I believe very strongly that the death of Jesus can only really be understood in the context of his life. From the very outset Jesus was feared, opposed, and rejected. Mary and Joseph had to flee into Egypt to protect the infant Jesus from death at the hands of Herod's soldiers. Once Jesus began his life of preaching and teaching, opposition to him quickly grew, especially among some of the religious leaders of the day, though not so much among the ordinary people. And it is amazing that some of the most bitter opposition emerged because of his miracles of healing, especially if they took place on the Sabbath Day, when one interpretation of the religious law insisted that not even good work could be performed. We struggle to understand how people can be so consumed by hatred, or fear, or ignorance that even miracles which set people free to live life fully and joyfully can be ignored or interpreted so negatively.

There is a phrase which occurs often in our scriptures which, although it doesn't explain it, does capture very well what seems to be happening. It is the phrase "hardness of heart". Already in the Old Testament God is spoken of as the one who wants to take away from his people their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh instead. In one of the psalms we pray that God would create



in us a pure heart. And in the New Testament, in contrast to the hardness of heart of those who oppose Jesus, the extraordinary love of Jesus is symbolised in his own heart, which is pierced as he hangs on the cross.

Hardness of heart is a sickness which stops us from seeing things as they really are. In this sense it is a kind of spiritual blindness, something about which Jesus often spoke. How can we see if our eyes are closed; how can we love if our hearts are hard?

As we gather here in the Cathedral this afternoon to enter into the mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus we are being invited to acknowledge that, like some of the Jewish leaders of Jesus' own time, our hearts too might have grown cold and our eyes might have become clouded. We do not see, or feel, or love as we should. It is not easy to admit this to ourselves and to others. But if we can, then we can come to Jesus in the same way that a blind man once came to him. *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Jesus asked the blind man. And his reply? *"Lord, let me see again"*. Jesus' response was immediate: *"Go; your faith has made you well."* Whenever someone came to him with faith, humility, and a recognition of his or her own helplessness and need, as the blind man did, Jesus reached out with grace and healing. Indeed it was almost the very last thing Jesus did before he died. When the thief who was crucified beside him prayed, *"Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom,"* the response of Jesus was immediate. *"Truly I say to you,"* he said, *"today you will be with me in paradise"*.

As we remember today the moment when the heart of Jesus was pierced by a lance, and blood and water flowed out, symbolising that Jesus held nothing back in giving himself to and for us in love, let us ask him to open our eyes to his love for us, take out of our flesh our hearts of stone, and place within us hearts of flesh, so that we can allow ourselves to be loved by him, and in turn love him and all his people as he has taught us to.