

**“A living stone, rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.”**

*1 Peter 2:4*

In today's Gospel passage we hear one of the Apostles say to Our Lord at the Last Supper, 'Show us the Father.' The answer surprises St Philip: 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.' Elsewhere in the New Testament St Paul tells us that Our Lord is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15). These two statements alone teach us a great deal about the nature of the Blessed Trinity, and distinguish Christianity from all the other religions of the world. Each Person of the Holy and Undivided Trinity shares in the one nature of the Godhead. There is only one God, yet there are three Persons who are possessed of the divine nature. And when the Father sends forth His Son into the world (Jn 20:21) it is to show us the Father and to make known to us all the truth about the Blessed Trinity (Jn 18:37). In other words, the Incarnation – the coming into this world of the Son of God made Man – is intended to make known to us everything that we need to know about God. And everything that we need to know about God is summed up in the crucifixion on Good Friday. On that day, more than on any other, we see the 'living stone [who was] rejected by men but [who] in the sight of God [is] chosen and precious.'

But why was He rejected? Why was Jesus of Nazareth rejected then, and why is He and His Church so often rejected now...?

...because He was not just a nice man who wanted everyone to get along with each other, and who wanted us all to care for one another and for the world in which we live. He is so often rejected precisely because His message is radically at odds with what the world wants to hear.

The world wants to hear about individual freedom, and mutual respect and tolerance. The world wants its thinking to be approved by the Church. It wants the Church to

be open to everything that it, the world, thinks important and of value. But the Church is not here to grant Her blessing upon wayward ideologies or sinful behaviour. It is not the task of the Church to accommodate Herself to the passing opinions of an ever-shifting world, or to bend to the winds of change.

The task of Our Lord two thousand years ago, and of the Church today, is to call people to repent of their sins, to change their lives – sometimes even at great cost – to leave sin behind, and live a life of Christian virtue instead. And this involves giving up things we have become attached to; it involves sacrifice, sometimes hard and painful sacrifice. And that is what the world cannot accept, namely that the Church says its ways are not good, and that *its* ways must be abandoned in favour of *God's* ways.

When the Church does Her job properly, and points to the Cross of sacrifice and self-denial, She is saying that we must abandon certain thoughts and practices, but this very command is, for many people, a stumbling block and an offence. The world doesn't care that sin offends God. All it is interested in is that no one has the right to offend *it*, or to cross *its* path of self-indulgence and self-obsession. 'How dare someone tell us that what we are doing is wrong? You believe in your religion if you want, but don't bother me with it or you will face my wrath!' Our religion is rejected by many because it is not focused exclusively on our personal comforts, conveniences, and pleasures but instead makes demands on us. Our religion is unpopular because it does not tolerate sin: sinners, yes; but sin, no.

At the Last Supper, when Our Lord said that those who had seen Him had seen the Father, He was pointing to His crucifixion. There, on the Cross, is the single most striking image of God. Look at the crucifix and you will see God, and you will see what God demands of us if we are to participate in the glory of the resurrection which followed.

If we would get to heaven, we must be willing to make our lives in this world into living sacrifices. Our lives should be one continuous gift to God, both in terms of our

vocation – such as the priesthood, or religious life, or marriage – and in terms of the way in which we live our lives on a daily basis: lives of Christian virtue, of self-denial, and of sacrifice.

The Crucifix stands as the still point at the heart of our religion. If we would be followers of Christ, then the same sacrifice must be at the heart of our daily living also.

Our first thought each morning should be, ‘What can I give to God today?’ and our closing thought each day should be, ‘What have I given God today, and what have I failed to give Him?’ Have I thought chiefly of myself this day? Or have I, as St Peter has instructed me in today’s Second Reading, proclaimed in my thoughts, and words, and deeds, ‘the excellencies of Him who called [me] out of darkness and into His marvellous light’?

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