

## **OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH**

### **HOMILY FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT (B)**

**29th MARCH 2009**

The letter to the Hebrews, from which our second reading comes, is different from the other New Testament letters. It was written to a community of Jews, probably priests, who had recently become Christian. They had given up their old priesthood; now they looked to Jesus as their new high priest. They had exchanged the Old Testament for the New - but they were beginning to have second thoughts.

They had had to give up everything for their new faith. They were living in exile, suffering persecution, and receiving no encouragement at all. Their world was slowly collapsing around them. They were demoralised, confused, depressed.

And so are many of us. We, like them, need encouragement.

The answer to their prayers was this letter. Perhaps it could be the answer to our prayers too.

The very short extract that we heard just now is one of the most important. They are told that Jesus is a compassionate high priest. During his life on earth he offered up prayer and petition to God the Father. He prayed not only in words, but “in silent tears.”

The Greek is much more direct. He prayed with strong crying and tears. This is real heart-felt emotion, the emotion that comes only from real engagement with those who suffer.

Jesus really cares about our suffering; Jesus not only cares but shares; He feels with us.

That's what compassion means – ‘feeling with’. Jesus feels our suffering with us. That's a help but there's more. He offered his prayer of tears to the one who had the power to save him out of death, God the Father.

What was true of Jesus then is true of Jesus now.

If he offered his prayer of tears to his Father then he is offering his prayer of tears to his Father now. God the Father has the power to save all of us who put our faith in him. God will save us from death, not from dying but from death.

When it seems that nothing more can go wrong, everything around has died, When it seems as if God himself has forgotten us, Jesus is praying to him who can save us from death, not just physical death but the spiritual death of despair.

God has the power to save us from every kind of death.

There's even more encouragement when we read that because Jesus submitted so humbly his prayer was heard. If his prayer was heard then his prayer is heard now.

We believe that Jesus is present with us at Mass. He lives in the consecrated bread and wine, the Blessed Sacrament. This is the same Jesus who prays for us with strong crying. He is not just present passively he is present actively, praying, sharing our suffering at every Mass. When we receive him in communion we are receiving the one who feels our suffering more deeply than anyone else can. He prays with us to the one who can save us out of death. This is the new covenant that Jeremiah is referring to.

In the gospel we hear Jesus expressing a brief moment of doubt.  
"What shall I say, Father save me from this hour?"

This is his temptation, to avoid the suffering, but he corrects himself quickly. No, that would be to miss the point of his coming. God intended Jesus to go through suffering not round it. A voice from heaven confirmed that Jesus was right.

We, too, have to go through suffering not round it. We have to face it head on. However, we do not face it alone. We have Jesus offering up prayer, "aloud and in silent tears" to the one who has the power to save us out of death. If we are suffering so is he.

We are in good company. He suffers with us, not for himself but for us.

Just as Jesus shares our suffering and offers it to God in prayer, so he expects us to be sensitive to the suffering of each other, to pray for each other and encourage each other.

No Christian should suffer alone.

**Rev Geoff Carey**