

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR PALM SUNDAY 2024

What are we ready to give up for love of others?

When we look to Jesus for an example it is tempting to say, 'Well, he was God so he knew what was going to happen and that he would be all right.'

But that answer is clearly not the case.

In the words of the ancient hymn in the second reading from St. Paul, Christ emptied himself, a central theme about Jesus in studies of him, he cleared out everything that was of God, and became as we are, as we all are.

There can be no clearer statement of what the early Church thought.

So as we have travelled with this young man, Jesus, during these last three years, although he has been opposed by many, yet also people have enthusiastically greeted him. Crowds have come out to listen to him. A crowd again has welcomed him into the capital city as if the new King of a free Jewish state. Individuals have followed him at his word, 'immediately.'

He has spoken against the authorities with impunity, it seems.

Even God has spoken well of him. His hopes are high.

But in these last days it has gone desperately wrong.

The authorities have stepped up their game.

Jewish leaders have bribed people to give false witness.

The Romans are edgy, Pilate gives way to the crowd.

His faithful band of disciples have hung on, but once the reality of his fate begins to bite, they are off.

Running so desperately as to leave their clothes in the hands of the police.

Betrayal has taken hold among them. First Judas and then even Simon Peter.

And on the cross, it is not, it seems, even his Father he calls on, but just God.

'Where is this distant God, with whom he has had such a close relationship?'

He is abandoned. His fall is dramatic.

And his death the most ignominious one. One that seems to end all his followers hopes. All lost. Total humiliation. Stripped even of his clothes.

And yet in the depths of fear, he has faith. 'Thy will be done.'

And from this faith comes the recognition of his task

by a Gentile Centurion.

His message will be accepted, he will be accepted, by the whole world.

A message of salvation for us all that can only come through his offering of his life.

Jesus is ready to give up everything for us, for love of us.

A love that makes no distinction between the good and the bad.

A love for all.