

Isaiah 52:13- 53:12; Psalm 30, Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42

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At the beginning of Holy Week, on Palm Sunday, we listened to the Passion of Christ according to Matthew. It was so recent that I need make no apology for reaching back a few days and draw out the words of some of the on lookers at Jesus's Crucifixion: *'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'*.<sup>1</sup>

This is a familiar phrase. Where have we heard it before? It appears at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus has been fasting in the wilderness for 40 days. At the end of this time the devil comes to him, tempting him three times, and beginning with those words, *'If you are the Son of God'*:

*'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread'*

If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. (off the temple)  
And lastly, the devil offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will but *'fall down and worship (him)*.<sup>2</sup>

The devil is testing this man Jesus, because he does not quite know what to make of him. He is not at all certain that Jesus really is the Son of God, otherwise he would not bother tempting him. But he cannot resist trying to draw out of him what sort of man he might be, what makes him tick, what makes him vulnerable.

Later on, the Jewish temple authorities, hearing his teaching and seeing some of his healing miracles, will also ask Jesus who he is: *'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?'*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:40

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 21: 23

They are really asking him if he claims authority from God, and if so, on what basis.

The vision of who Jesus seems always to be blurred behind a veil of human spiritual blindness. Even when Jesus calms the storm, the disciples ask: *'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*

All of these are temptations placed in front of Jesus. He could be so popular if only he would fully disclose himself. If only he would turn stones into bread rather than just obscurely breaking bread they already have into many pieces as when he feeds the 4,000<sup>4</sup> he would be the most popular social reformer the world has ever known. And then the final temptation to avoid suffering and humiliation: *'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'*.<sup>5</sup> If he had, what then?

I do not entirely know. It seems clear that Jesus's miracles are almost all restorative, rather than declarative, that is to say, they heal rather than impose respect. I sense that with God's power fully disclosed by Jesus coming down from the cross many would follow him out of fear and awe rather than love. More importantly - and to the detriment of our salvation - he would not have experienced the full terror of our human condition: that death separates us from life. He would not have felt the full weight of our sins: envy, abandonment, cowardice, hatred, malice and brutality. These all bear the stamp of death. If Jesus had come down from the cross He would not have bound himself irrevocably to our humanity and to the distance that we forge between ourselves and God. And then He could not have bridged it with outstretched arms. *'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'*.<sup>6</sup> It was because he was the Son of God that he chose to stay there, with us.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:40

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 26:40

## Easter – Good Friday 2026

That is Matthew's focus.

Today, for a moment, John, in his gospel, draws our gaze down from Jesus to the base of the Cross. There, some soldiers divide up his clothes. There some faithful followers of Jesus are huddled together. Jesus speaks a few last words, to a disciple: *'Behold, your mother!'* and then we are told that *'From that hour the disciple took her to his own home.'* Pope Benedict observed that a more literal reading is, *'From that hour he welcomed her into his own existence'.<sup>7</sup>* It is only then that Jesus utters his last words: *'It is accomplished'.*

From the earliest times, since the age of the Apostles, Mary has been deeply revered by Christians, holding her purity and sanctity in a special regard and love. They have loved her and prayed devotions to her, because Jesus has loved her, and on the cross Jesus gave her to be loved and venerated, to be welcomed; not just given a home, but welcomed 'into our own existence'. If you want to love like Jesus, then look on who Jesus loved and entrusted himself to. If you want love Jesus, then learn to gaze through the heart of the one who loved him most. Draw closer to Mary at the foot of the cross.

This Good Friday we have - in a single glance at the cross - Jesus who unites himself with us by refusing to come down from the cross, and Jesus who asks us to unite ourselves with him by loving his mother. This will take us to the Resurrection.

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict in Khan, Peter, Behold Your Mother, (CTS 2023 London)