



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Good Friday 2019

The church is small.
The walls inside White.

On the altar a cross, with behind it its shadow and behind that the shadow of its shadow.

The world outside knows nothing of this nor cares.

The two shadows are because of the shining of two candles: as many the lights, so many the shadows.

So we learn something of the nature of God, the endlessness of whose recessions are brought up short by the contemporaneity of the Cross.ⁱ

Outside the walls of this parish church - and the walls of other parish churches and cathedrals around the globe - the world, to use the priest-poet R S Thomas' words, "knows nothing of this nor cares".

Long ago, all Christian worship was celebrated in secret and, at various points in the Church's liturgies, those who had not been baptised would be removed from the assembly so that the Church could ensure that

only those who had passed through her arduous initiation rites could partake of her sacred mysteries.

Well those days have long gone, but today on this Good Friday, the world outside knows still knows nothing nor cares about what happens within our Church buildings.

Over recent days, however, there appears to have been a genuine outpouring of care for at least one Church building, the fire-ravaged cathedral of Notre Dame.

Hundreds of millions of Euros have already been pledged so that the building can be rebuilt and, once again, take its place as France's most-visited tourist attraction.

Of all the images of the damaged edifice, the one which has stuck in my mind this Holy Week is that of the high altar with a golden cross behind it, marooned in a sea of fallen and smouldering rubble.

On the altar a cross, with behind it its shadow and behind that the shadow of its shadow.

I wonder though if the watching, tweeting world, cares as much about what goes on inside the building as what it now looks like from the outside.

What does the world outside know of this and does it care?

On Good Friday, the cross takes centre stage: it is the object of our devotion and, like all objects of true devotion, becomes the lens through which we glimpse something of God's love.

That cross, is a cross of rough-hewn wood; it stands not in a gilded sanctuary above a precious but smoke-damaged altar, nor even here in the gilded cage of this sanctuary, but outside a city on a festering dung

heap, and the young beaten-up man who hangs on it is surrounded not by adoring worshippers but by a hostile braying mob – literally out for his blood.

The world beyond this pathetic brutal execution scene knew nothing of it nor cared about it and simply got on with its business - in much the same way that men and women the world over today, are going about their business as our thoughts are fixed on that cross.

Yet, Christ died on Calvary not just for those of us who gather inside our churches in the bleakness Good Friday, nor just for those who gather together in the glorious light of Easter - but for everyone, in all places, and for all time.ⁱⁱ

On Good Friday, the God who loved the world which had rejected him, so much that he gave his only Son, gives his life for the creation he has loved into being.

On the bloodied hill of Calvary, we learn all that we need to learn about the nature of God; the love who searches for us and which seeks us out; the love who withholds nothing from us, not even God's very self; the love which will never let us go; the love who forgives our waywardness and welcomes us no matter who we are, where we are, what we do; regardless if we if we know nothing and care even less.

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ⁱ R S Thomas, *The Cross on the Altar*

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 7.27, Hebrews 10.10, 1 Peter 3.18, etc.

ⁱⁱⁱ R S Thomas, *The Cross on the Altar*