

## Good Friday 2024 Meditation: The face of Jesus

### Priest Pastor

With what joy Mary gazed upon the face of her newborn son, looking into his eyes, so full of innocence yet also with an ancient wisdom.

Carrying her son into the Temple, Simeon and Anna also saw in that little face, the one for whom they had been waiting all their lives. Any baby is a miracle, a promise, a path into the future, but this one had an additional dimension, eternity was in those eyes.

Jesus the man had no extremity of appearance, Isaiah suggests, as he describe the suffering servant, no model like looks, or towering stature. But when you looked into his face, there was the unutterable beauty of divine love, compassion, something beyond. And yes, anger sometimes, when others were abusive or cruel. But that holy face was one you would never tire of gazing at as you sat at his feet, like Mary of Bethany. At times of crises, when you were desperate, possessed, fearful, sick, his face turned towards you would send the darkness packing. Those eyes fixed on yours would be the balm of Gilead.

But the world cannot bear too much beauty, too much purity. Because it shows up ugliness in contrast. It is a thing to be feared, destroyed. There were those who could not look into Jesus' eyes, who wished to never see his face again.

There was strength in that face too.

He set his face like flint as he travelled towards Jerusalem.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus sensing what was to be his fate, prayed with such anguish that sweat ran down his face like great drops of blood.

On this day of days, Jesus was taken, after his arrest, to be interrogated by the High Priest. During this, he was struck upon his dear face by a guard.

Perhaps the first time that that face of true beauty had ever been struck.

The Crown of Thorns was pushed into his forehead, and the drops of his precious blood must have run into his eyes, making them sting.

The soldiers were egged on by this and punched him further.

Violence begets violence. In Isaiah's words he gave his cheeks

to those who pulled out the beard and did not hide his face from insult and spitting.

On the way of the cross, by tradition, a woman wiped his face  
to bring a temporary softness and kindness.

Just as his mother had done when he was an infant.

And then, as predicted in his babyhood, a sword pierced Mary's heart,  
as she gazed upon her son.

His face so soft as an infant, now distorted by pain and punches.

So marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance as Isaiah describes.

Eventually, as Mary watched, the light went out of his eyes, his face sagged.

There will come a time in the next couple of days

when we will hear the wonderful accounts of Jesus'

resurrected and transformed face, unrecognisable at first, but glorious in its new life.

But that is to come.

For today, we gaze upon that bruised and abused face of Jesus,

that shows us the extent of God's love for each and every one of us

and the liberation it brings. And as we venerate the cross with awe and thankfulness

we in heart and mind kiss his feet and indeed kiss his face,

not with a kiss of betrayal like Judas, but a kiss of love,

faint and fickle though it may be, but received with an infinite grace.

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.