

## TENEBRAE - why dwell on the anguish of Christ?

We know many fears, troubles and distress: Financial, social scandal, terminal illness, violence and crime, war and terrorism, abuse, to be the object of aggression. These fears are real for many people - even children - and are all terrible.

*The Bible knows a feeling of horror, anguish and fear that is more distressing than any of these that we hear about or encounter: It is the anguish of being a lost sinner, standing before the throne of judgment. True horror is to come before a holy God and his resentment for those who resisted his will and plan for their lives, consciously choosing impurity, hatred and disobedience, rather than love, faith, hope, and obedience.*

*The greatest fear is of those who are before the throne of God, realising the consequences of not accepting the Lord's invitation to receive his grace, mercy and redemption. The greatest fear, distress and horror is the distress of the lost on the judgment day.*

This is the sorrow, the fear and the distress that Jesus experienced, from the garden of Gethsemane, to the utter darkness on the cross when he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knew that the judgment of God for all the sins of the world would be upon him! Not because he ever sinned, or disobeyed or transgressed, but because of the sins of the whole world.

We read about this fear in the gospels. In (KJ) Mk 14:34 Jesus says: My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death. And the NIV puts it like this: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

*"Overwhelmed with sorrow" means a lot more than these three words can capture. We do not have enough words to recall the experience Jesus had when he carried our judgment. But these words may help us: Fear, terror, horror, sorrow, grief, distress, anguish, troubled, disturbed, pain, suffering, death.*

*But what is the cause of this overwhelming sorrow? Jesus was not overwhelmed, because he feared death; it was not Judas, or the chief priests or Pontius Pilate that brought about his anguish. It was not even the horrors of the cruel death on the cross that caused him this distress.*

*It was the fear of God's judgment that brought the Saviour to the point of the raw terror of hell itself.*

**But why dwell on this darkness? Why observe Tenebrae?** What are we supposed to learn from it? What is the reason that this dark night is so clearly recorded?

*In the darkness of Christ's anguish we discover who we really are, without the grace of God and the redeeming work of Jesus, without the cross and the salvation and the forgiveness of God.*

And we see the depth of the love and the mercy of Christ for sinners, for me and for you. We see, how much he really loves us.

*It is not without reason that the Bible records that in Gethsemane Jesus asked his closest friends, Peter, James and John, to keep watch with him while he prayed. It was not because*

any human could help him in this hour of overwhelming distress. Yet he asked them, and asks us - to keep watch with him! To do this in remembrance with him. To never forget his suffering. What difference can it make? Because, like the first disciples, we have a responsibility towards the Lord who loves us so much!

Moved by the overwhelming sorrow of Christ and by the reality of what we are saved from, and the cost of it all, we are called to keep watch and pray to not fall into temptation again. And to keep watch with Christ, for the sake of the salvation of the world. Shall we not keep watch and pray with Jesus when we understand the predicament of those who die without forgiveness?

*After we saw what Jesus did for us, how can we not remember his commission?*

Keep watch with me, and pray.

Go, he said, even to the ends of the earth, and proclaim the good news of salvation, make disciples of all.

After we saw his love and felt some of his sorrow and his distress at Tenebrae, how can we not go!