

The Passion is the historical record of Christ's death, but its message is outside time. The world continues to crucify Christ. There is no role in that drama, be it Judas or Peter or Pilate, that we are incapable of playing.

Jesus Christ was not the first man to die for a cause, nor the last. He was not the first or last innocent man to be put to death. He was not the only one ever crucified. There were on that very same day two others. Even as regards physical pain it is at least possible that others have suffered as much. What then makes the passion so different ? And it **is** undeniably different.

The gospel account is roughly about two newspaper columns long, and even though I've read it, or heard it read hundreds of times, I have to say that it still affects me. I wonder why ? I think the answer lies in the details – the completely human and utterly shabby circumstances in which Christ died.

For example – the behaviour of his friends. Was there ever such a complete let-down ? Judas, one of the twelve, especially chosen. One can feel the hurt, almost the unbelief in Christ's gentle words, "Friends, why are you here ? Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss ?"

One could almost stomach the betrayal of Judas had the other eleven remained faithful. No way. One short line tells their story: "And they all forsook him and fled." And Peter – surely not Peter. Think of all those miracles Christ worked with Peter one of the privileged witnesses. He raised the dead child to life, set him walking on water, was transfigured before him. Only a few short hours before, Peter had boasted, "Even though all abandon you, I will follow you to prison and to death". He followed alright – in the words of the gospel – at a distance, a safe distance. And when he was cornered – it wasn't even that – a jibe or two from a servant girl looking for notice, Peter the Rock disintegrated. "He began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man." That must really have hurt Jesus. "And Jesus turning looked at Peter and Peter went out and wept bitterly". And these were Jesus' friends, his only friends. The people he lived with and loved. The people he showered his miracles on and shared his secrets with. And not one of them lifted a finger for him.

So what has this story to do with us ? It is the story of our salvation. But it is more, much more. It is the story of our lives. There isn't a part in the whole sordid script that we, you and I, wouldn't play to perfection. Peter in his pride and Peter in his fall and, hopefully, Peter in his repentance too. We'd fit in perfectly with the disciples who fled at the first sign of danger, or with Caiaphas and the high priests, with their self-righteousness and eagerness to reform others while ignoring themselves, or with Pilate in his abuse of authority, or the mob with its thirst for excitement and blood. And Judas ? Let's face it – there's a Judas in all of us. There are times and situations in all our lives when Jesus could easily say to us as he said to Judas, "Friend, why are you here ?" The truth is, it was only his friends who could have crucified him so.