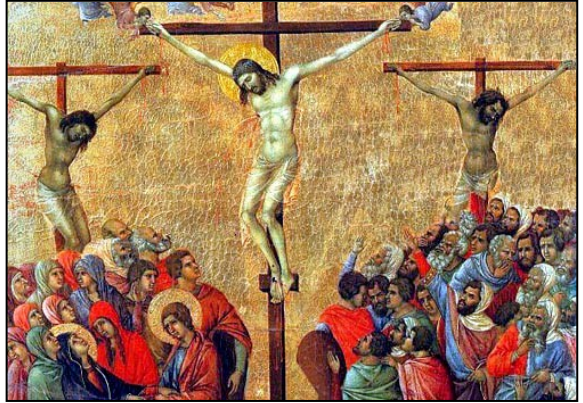


Maundy Thursday Day 44

So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

15.16-32

Given Jesus' record as a performer of miracles, including walking on water and calming storms, it is hard to imagine that the chief priests and scribes did not harbour some lingering doubts about whether he would succumb to nails and a cross. What if he had responded to the jeers of the passers-by and come down from the cross?



Equally imaginable is their sense of relief at his seeming inability to respond by doing so. Surely their own mockery is emboldened by their swollen confidence that he is a mere mortal after all. Are they not thereby vindicated in regarding him as an imposter, a blasphemer? Surely God would not allow the Messiah to be killed at the hands of Gentiles!

If these were indeed their thoughts, they were mistaken in every case. However it is the irony of their taunts which is most striking.

Firstly, saving others is precisely what he *is* doing, and he can only do that by *not* saving himself. In his own words the previous evening: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many."

Secondly, their only true words are those said in jest: this is the Christ, the King of Israel.

Thirdly, their claim that seeing will lead to believing confirms they will never see. They have witnessed more than enough to justify faith; they will yet see an empty tomb. Jesus will give no other proof. Their only recourse now is not to further signs - but to repentance.

? Do you perceive the cross as the greatest of Jesus' signs?



Lord God, because your ways are not our ways I struggle to comprehend fully the cross. Grant me a deeper understanding, I pray, of your self-sacrificial love, that my faith in you might be strengthened. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.