Twenty-ninth Sunday In ordinary time (B) 2018

I’m off back to the Concentration Camp again - not literally - but I’m going back there as I often do when the subject of suffering comes up as it does today. And once again to Victor Frankl, the psychologist who survived Auschwitz, and his observation that it was not just the suffering that destroyed people, it was meaningless suffering. Those who could put what they were going through in the context of faith, who had some sense of hope, of meaning, survived the horrors around them much better than those without any faith

Suffering is part of the human condition – we all experience it to a greater or lesser degree. It tests our faith – we do not understand how a good God could allow suffering. This is a major problem for us – and along with everybody else I don’t know the answer. But what we HAVE got is a God who identifies himself with suffering. In Jesus we have a God who has suffered – and through suffering risen to new life and new hope – this is the centre of our faith “Lord by your cross and resurrection you have set us free, you are the saviour of the world’

The Cross. We need it before our eyes – especially in difficult, painful times. The Cross is not a final statement – is the beginning of a statement which ends with Resurrection. Death leads to life. Winter is followed by the Spring. And if this sounds like unrealistic and impractical Christianity remember the Concentration Camp. Faith like that help people survive in conditions we don’t even want to imagine.

Our Lord’s suffering should give us respect for all who suffer – they are very closely linked with him and they share his dignity. It is one of the worst failings we can show to feel superior to those who are obviously having greater difficulties that ourselves. It is, unfortunately, not uncommon for people to be kicked when they are down. For us it amounts to blasphemy – ‘what ever you do to the least of these … you do to me.’

In Jesus we have a supreme high priest who has travelled with us – who knows our weaknesses and has experienced human pain. ‘Let us be confident then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are need of help.’ It is of immense benefit to each f us to understand this - it would be of immense benefit to our world if we were to tell them what we have understood.