

Devotional Address at Glastonbury 2017
Given by Bishop Roger Jupp, Chairman of the Glastonbury Pilgrimage
Association, after the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament
and prior to Benediction

In the Stations of the Cross, the entombment is the fourteenth. The body of Jesus is laid by Joseph in dust and ashes. On his journey to the cross, the Lord Jesus fell often to the ground under the weight of the cross and after enduring an unimaginable scourging. It was a sign to him of the mortality he shares with mankind: though divine, he stripped himself of that divinity and took upon himself our human nature. And human nature is born to die, to return to the dust from which it has been formed. So these falls on the way to Calvary prepare the Lord for his entering into the mystery of death.

The Psalmist wrote: "You turn us back to dust and say: "Turn back, O children of earth." And in another place he says: "He will not suffer your foot to stumble; he who watches over you will not sleep." And, as the liturgy of the Church reminds us, though we are dust and ashes, God has prepared for those who love him a heavenly dwelling place.

Here, just now, we have been walking with Jesus, the Bread of Life, through the dust of the street. That journey of the Lord on his way to the cross through the streets of Jerusalem must have been a similar experience for the people of that city. The procession of the condemned to the place of execution must have happened so often that it caused only a few to pause in their business – the curious, the mocking, the scornful, the pitying – whilst most others went about their everyday activity. "In the midst of life we are in death" is a truth for all times and all places. The way to the cross on Good Friday was a proclamation of the power and the love of God, of his self-nourishing, of his entry into human life and the human condition in one like us, though sinless. Still, perhaps, the mystery of that truth goes unnoticed, although our

confused and confusing world needs the message of God's salvation in Christ just as much. Then, as now, we only find God in the brokenness of humanity, in the dust and the dirt of the way of the cross. Our walking with Jesus the Bread of Life through these streets remains the powerful symbol of the God who enters into the midst of our world but is often disregarded because the drama of his entry is not what is expected. Bread is a simple and fragile thing and quickly crumbles to dust. But this Bread is what the Lord has taken into his hands, what he has blessed, broken and given to be shared. "As often as you eat this bread... you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," St Paul tells us.

The journey to the cross was a triumphant procession. It led to the Lord's glorification and to his victory over evil and sin and death. Our walking with Jesus, the Bread of Life, is a symbol for us of that journey from death to life, despite sharing in the dust and ashes of human existence. We too go with him to glorification, for God has taken what is ours and raised it up out of dust and ashes. By becoming what we are, by sharing in our human nature, God in Christ has blessed it and raised it and shared with us what we are to become by our being united with Jesus in his passion and death. All we have to do is join his way to the cross – to follow him and enter into his mystery. To go with Jesus, the Bread of Life, to find ourselves nourished and fed, sustained and defended, led by him through the dust of the desert of this life to the green pastures of that place he has prepared for those who love him. Those who follow in the way of the Bread of Life know these things and rejoice in them. Both rich and poor, with the saints, stretch out eager hands to take God's holy food.

"Let Christ crucified be sufficient for thee, and with him do thou suffer and rest," urges St John of the Cross. As we recall the Lord Jesus entombed at the hands of Joseph of Arimathaea, we are reminded by the Carmelite saint that "He that seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ." And that "if we would attain the possession of Christ, never seek him without the cross."

Having walked with Christ, the Bread of Life, we now seek his blessing. We come to remind ourselves of what St Paul tells us, that we have entered into the tomb with Christ: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6: 3-4). We walk in newness of life; we do not seek the living amongst the dead. It is the risen and glorified Lord who feeds us; the Bread of Life is the food for our journey. As he blesses us now, the Lord is in our midst, entombed no longer, and says to us "Peace be with you," and shows us his wounded hands. That is, "Be fearful no longer, but believing." Lovingly he greets us and scatters fear and gloom. He the Lord is with us until the end of the age - always with us, dwelling with us, pitching his tent in our hearts and lives. He tells us that though in the world we will have sorrows and discomforts – all summed up in the word 'tribulation' – we must have courage for he has overcome the world.

So with saints and angels, with all the blessed ones of Glastonbury, we can sing "Exult, O dust and ashes! The Lord shall be thy part: his only, his for ever, thou shalt be, and thou art!" Blessed, praised, and hallowed, be Jesus Christ on his throne of glory, and in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar!