



**“Those who do what is true come to the light”
(Jn 3:21)**

Reflections for Lent from the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN)

The mystery of the cross

Our reflection for Palm Sunday is written by Sr Mary Owens I.B.V.M., director of Nyumbani, which includes Kenya's first and largest facility for HIV-positive orphans, a home-based care program and Nyumbani Village.

“Hosanna! Blessings on the King of Israel, who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Jn 12:13)

“Pilate spoke again: ‘But... what am I to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’ They shouted back, ‘Crucify him.’” (Mk 15:12-13)

In the space of five days, under the influence of the chief priests, those who acclaimed Jesus as Lord now seek His destruction.

Our liturgical celebration today brings us face to face with what is core in our Christian faith, the mystery of the Cross. Paul says in the first letter to the Corinthians (23-25), “...while the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, here are we preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews an obstacle that they cannot get over, to the pagans madness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power and wisdom of God.” Today, how might we be influenced away from proclaiming Jesus as Saviour?

Our world is becoming more and more secularised as a result of advances in mass production and technological development. The pursuit of riches, to live a life hedged in with every consumer comfort and exotic leisure pursuits, can now be seen as the goal to be achieved. This ideal is being realised for the few at the expense of a work force that is becoming more and more impersonal. The end result is further exclusion of an increasing number of people and frequently the loss of their means of livelihood.

In this secularised scenario, the marginalised in our world – children and adults living with HIV, orphans, refugees, the elderly, people who have been trafficked, others who are addicted, have no place. They can simply be forgotten.

Even we as Christians can be influenced by this trend. We can be tempted to be satisfied with a solely spiritual and personal relationship with Jesus. We can side-line reaching out to the poor and those who are excluded in society, avoid advocating for the elimination of the structural causes of poverty and the priority of life over materialism.

The call in today's celebration is to remain faithful to Jesus both in times when we rejoice in our faith and in times when faithfulness to our commitment is put to the test, even taking us to the foot of the Cross. In the words of Pope Francis: "Sometimes we are tempted to be the kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery... to stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives..." (The Joy of the Gospel 270). This may mean facing the incomprehensible in human suffering, feeling powerless, risking one's own reputation – facing the mystery of the Cross.

At Nyumbani, we continue to reach out to children who have inherited HIV. And we see how our experience at the beginning – when we were told that 'these babies are going to die anyway; get into prevention' – is still being played out. This is because only 39% of children in Kenya who have inherited HIV are receiving antiretroviral treatment. Why? Is there still a subtle belief that these children should die so as not to be a burden on society? Could it be that, like all the other marginalised who mirror the suffering Jesus, they are seen as unwanted in a world consumed with the desire for a life in which the Cross of Jesus has no place?

As we live through His passion and death with Jesus during Holy Week, may we be further graced to live and witness courageously to the truth of our faith.