

## **Tuesday Reflection 30 March 2021 - Tuesday of Holy Week**

In his homily on Palm Sunday, Fr Naz explained how the events of Holy Week demonstrated the best and the worst of human nature. Where evil and human weakness seem to triumph, there is also goodness. For example, the desertion of Jesus by His male disciples is set against the steadfastness and fidelity demonstrated by His female followers

Reflecting on this and on the apparent triumph of evil, I thought of the Nazi concentration camps and death camps under other regimes, and was reminded of the Ravensbruck prayer. Ravensbruck was a concentration camp for women some 50km north of Berlin in which 92,000 women and children perished. The following prayer was found scrawled on wrapping paper near the body of a dead child:

*Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will also those of ill will.*

*But do not only remember the suffering they have inflicted on us.*

*Remember the fruits we have brought, thanks to this suffering--our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this.*

*And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness. Amen*

This prayer would merit detailed examination and analysis; suffice it to say here that it is a prayer for forgiveness in which the unspeakable suffering inflicted by the camp guards is outweighed by the goodness the inmates of the camp demonstrated towards each other - blind subservience to an inhumane system is set against human solidarity and mutual support. What is perhaps most remarkable is that the love and responsibility which the inmates displayed was even extended to their torturers.

The Viennese psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl, who survived the horrors of Auschwitz, wrote a book entitled *Man's search for meaning* in which he argued that what helped him and others survive was that they sought for meaning in what was happening, and it was this sense-finding in what was happening that makes the Ravensbruck prayer so poignant. Through their solidarity and the love they showed each other, the inmates of Ravensbruck achieved redemption for their persecutors. They did not choose their situation, but rather than falling into the role of helpless victims they maintained the power and responsibility to seek and practise the good in the midst of unspeakable evil.

**Michael Townson**