

# Friday

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On this, the most solemn day of Holy Week, I want to make a few comments about a poem entitled Indifference, by the British Anglican priest, Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy (1883-1929).

Indifference

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree,

They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;  
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep,  
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed Him by.  
They would not hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;  
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,  
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,'  
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and  
through;  
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,  
And Jesus crouched against a wall, and cried for Calvary.

My first comment is to repeat the well-known saying, attributed to the Jewish author and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel, that the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. We don't need to hate to harm. The poem ironically contrasts the "crude and cruel" past with the "civilised" and "more tender" society of today, but in fact he suggests that indifference and apathy is just as cruel. Your collective effort with homeless people at this time overcomes apathy and indifference and shows us the way forward. Secondly, as the Lord Jesus taught us in Matthew 25:31-46, in a collection of sayings placed by Matthew in Holy Week, what we do to the least of his sisters and brothers we do to him.

The Lord Jesus comes to us in poor and humble strangers, inviting us to welcome him and share our humanity. In Matthew 25 he does not expect us to heal the sick or get the prisoners released from jail; if we care for the sick and visit the prisoners we have already acknowledged him in our struggling neighbours. Even one cup of cold water makes a mark in the reckoning of God's justice.

Do not regard your effort as insignificant. It has not changed the municipal system of Tshwane and has not (yet) led to permanent shelters, but what you are doing is a significant step towards that goal. The dignified and careful way you launched into these projects, at short notice and with little time to prepare, has made an impact and will bear its own fruit – for the homelessness project in Tshwane but also for your own lives.

Finally, the poem suggests that Lord Jesus not only prayed for those responsible for his crucifixion; he also prays for those of us today who ignore the plight of lonely and suffering people around us. From the cross he also committed his mother Mary into the care of the disciple whom he loved, so that she would not be homeless and exposed. That is the love flowing from the cross of the Saviour, caring for vulnerable women and ensuring their dignity. Persevere in this challenging work of care and support, even as days get longer and everyday irritations increase.

May the power of crucified Love enfold and embrace you (no distancing there!) as you continue this journey.

Prayer

Holy Mystery

We will never fathom the depth of your love for this broken world

We see your arms outstretched on the cross, embracing us all

Praying that we will be forgiven our cruelty and our indifference

Embracing us in our rebellion, our apathy and our selfishness

Longing that we may begin to know what we are doing – to you and to  
the least of yours

Do not let go of us, we pray. Do not let go.

Amen