

THE ROOD

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count as loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

It was a cold, dull morning and very overcast as I arrived at church. Inside it was quite dark as the lights had not yet been turned on. Father Tom was sitting at the side of the altar praying. I was the first to arrive for morning mass. I knelt in my usual place, looked at the tabernacle and thanked Jesus for being there for me and also for calling me to receive him at this mass. I then sat back on my seat, closed my eyes and listened. All was calm and quiet. In our beautiful church, hanging above the altar, there is a magnificent rood, a large cross with the figure of Christ nailed to it. At the base of the cross, one on either side, stand two figures, Mary and John the apostle. When I looked up at it, in the dim light of the church, it seemed like a dark shadow.

When the lights in the church were switched on, I looked back up at the Rood and began to observe Jesus' wounds; the crown of thorns, the nailed hands and feet and the wound in his side made by the lance which told the soldier there was no need to further disfigure the body for it was dead. As I looked at the crown, I thought of the mental anguish that Jesus endured prior to his arrest. So great that He, the Son of God, cried out to his father to take this cup away but then completely submitted to the Father's will. I tried to imagine the pain of each sharp cruel thorn piercing his scalp. I thought of those hands nailed to the wood; hands that had healed the sick, given sight to the blind and raised the dead back to life; those feet that had walked so many miles to give the message of salvation; and I thought of the wounds that are never displayed; the scars left on his back from the torturous scourging at the pillar. I imagined the bruises and cuts to his face and body brought about by the abuse, the blows and rough-handling of his captors; the damage to his shoulders from the heavy cross he carried; the damage to his knees when he fell three times under the weight of it. I wondered which hurt him most, the crucifixion or the sins of mankind which made it necessary for our salvation. I felt very emotional and for the first time while looking at a crucifix, my eyes filled with tears.

*See from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

I looked then at Mary, his mother and could not even begin to imagine her anguish. Here was the son she gave birth to in a lowly cattle shed; the baby she cradled in her arms as she sang a lullaby. This was the boy that was missing for three days and brought so much anxiety to Mary and Joseph not knowing where he was; the teenager who showed so much care and consideration for everyone he met. This was the young man who comforted and consoled her when her husband died; the man who had, at her request, changed water into wine when she interceded for the steward at Cana. I think she would have remembered the prophesy of Simion that a sword would pierce her heart. I am sure, to her, it felt more like a thousand swords!

*Were all the realms of nature mine,
That were an offer far too small.
Love so amazing so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

The Rood is quite ornate and it seemed a contradiction to so dreadful an event it was commemorating, but then I realised that the crucifixion led to the resurrection, the greatest event of all time.

O Jesus, my Lord and my God, have mercy on me a sinner!
Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for me.