

The grounded hope of Good Friday

- [Andrew Hamilton](#)
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In its Christian context, Easter Sunday celebrates the rising of Jesus to life. It follows his brutal execution on Good Friday after rigged trials. Good Friday this year occurs at the beginning of April, a month which Pope Francis dedicated to prayer for 'those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis'.



Main image: Good Friday Procession In Jerusalem's Old City (David Silverman/Getty Images)

Such prayers have always been necessary. The sun will always rise on brave people as they wake ready to continue their struggle for justice, though wondering whether at the end of the day they will still be free and alive. Most live in towns and villages of which we have never heard, in nations about which our media report little. But sometimes we see the urgency of prayer written on the public images of people who have risked their lives.

Movies have made us familiar with the faces of those who formed a chain, passing from one to another Jewish people in flight from Nazi extermination. The poems of writers who were killed or exiled to Siberia during the purges in Stalinist Russia evoke other images. We may also remember the faces of young students who offered flowers to soldiers during protests in Manila and Tiananmen Square.

More recently we have seen the faces of students in Myanmar as they offered roses to the soldiers blocking their protest. Sadly these peaceful gestures have so often been rejected with implacable bloodshed and imprisonment.

It is surely right for people who have seen their human rights violated and have suffered in defence of their families, friends and fellow citizens to be outraged by the savagery with which powerful, ambitious men with guns go successfully to war against their unarmed fellow citizens in order to protect their self-claimed entitlements. It would be hard not to nurture rage and hatred against the perpetrators.

Good Friday properly belongs in that world of outrage at the violation of humanity. It does not move us away from horror and anger but invites a pause for close reflection on them. On Good Friday expediency, brutality and military efficiency at killing had the last word. It was the last day of someone who lived as if every human life, every human person, was precious to him, who spoke of peace and non-violence, and of a God to be found in the carpet of flowers in the fields and not in murderous lines of troops.

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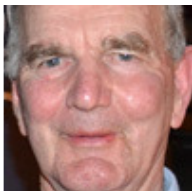
On Good Friday he was arrested, beaten up in prison, condemned to death in rigged legal proceedings, was torn by whips, nailed to pieces of dead wood and left there naked, stripped of humanity and value. On the wood of his cross no flowers grew.

The pause of Good Friday invites us to turn our attention away from the men with guns and on to the people who die, are raped and tortured by them, whose flowers are trampled by them, and whose cause is crushed by overwhelming power. It is a time for tears of respect for good and brave people.

It invites us also to look past the death-masks of soldiers clad in black, and on to the faces and coloured dress of young people who have approached them in peace, on to the faces of women who have beaten pots and pans in the markets to express their rejection of tyranny, and on to the fleeting faces of shadowed people who have filmed state violence, protested against it in poetry and song, sent news of it through the world, and have begged our support.

Good Friday is a day of solidarity. It sets the lives of all these brave people, dead and living, and the lives of all those whose dignity they defended in a wider arc where the value of a life sacrificed and a freedom vainly fought for is not lost but shines and is woven into the tapestry of relationships between people and world, between past, present and future, a tapestry that will never be unpicked. It is about hope against hope, its face set not against anger but against despair

The arc of the Christian story of Good Friday also reaches beyond remembering and beyond solidarity to a grounded hope. In it the man who was killed on Good Friday is the Son of God who shared fully our humanity in all its betrayals and abandonment, rose from the dead victorious over its power, and whose spirit remains with us. Neither for him nor for others who share his fate are death or defeat the last words. The last word belongs to life and to the solidarity that his rising engenders.



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