

Every year the Church invites us to do some biblical criticism. Every year in Holy Week we listen to two accounts of the Passion of Jesus; and we are implicitly invited to compare the two accounts; to note the differences and observe the varying emphases.

Most people, I suspect, hear the passion stories in the Gospels but could not tell one from another. They are thought of as variations on a theme as you would find the same story retold in a different way in the *Sun* to that in the *Guardian*. It would therefore come as a surprise to most people to learn that, despite the first Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary. Jesus never underwent “an agony in the Garden of Gethsemane”. It is a point I have made several times but it merits repetition: In no Gospel is there recorded an agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. What we find if we look at the Gospels themselves is an agony described by Luke, but this is situated vaguely as 'the place' on the Mount of Olives. A garden is mentioned by John but Jesus does not pray there; he is arrested as soon as he arrives. 'Gethsemane' is referred to in Mark and also in Matthew, where Jesus prays in anguish and is arrested. But there is no '*agonia*' except in Luke and this is a technical word from the games arena which refers to the moment of tension before the starting bell when the athlete is at the zenith of readiness, sweat breaks forth and the test of strength and skill begins. These are all run together to give the popular, but erroneous, picture of an “Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane”. This weaving together has happened throughout the Passion account and the wider Gospel narratives and the consequence is that we have one story in our minds with no differentiation between each evangelist's particular and important understanding of Jesus' Passion. The way each tells the story is very different; and we should seize the opportunity to actually look at the separate accounts and see the particular insight each Gospel writer brings to us.

Mark, whose Passion story we heard last Sunday, is very different to that of John. Mark tells us of Jesus who is a prophet but who is greater than any prophet before him. He speaks and acts with the authority of God. He forgives sins, controls the wind and the seas; he brings a little girl back to life. These are attributes of God. But Jesus is nevertheless clearly identifiable as one like us. As the ministry progresses Jesus is increasingly isolated and alone. Significant groups, the Herodians and the Pharisees seek to destroy him. His family want to take him in charge because they are convinced he is out of his mind. His townsfolk reject him. Even his chosen disciples continually misunderstand him and will eventually betray, desert or deny him. As death approaches he is fearful and in mortal anguish. He dies on the cross, alone and abandoned even, he feels, by God. Exactly as we might feel enduring an excruciating, shameful death.

Not so the picture of Jesus in the fourth Gospel. Throughout the Gospel Jesus is the Word made flesh; one with the Father; a divine figure, all-knowing, all-powerful. There is no anguished prayer in John. The nearest we get to that is a question: "What

shall I say - Father save me from this hour?" And that is immediately suppressed: "No, It is for this that I came." Jesus goes to his death fully in control, protecting his disciples, shepherding them away when he is arrested. Beaten and scourged he remains supreme: "Behold the man". Pilate speaks the truth unknowingly: "Here is your King". On the cross Jesus is still in control, entrusting mother (family) to disciple and disciple to mother. He dies only when he has done the will of his Father and completed the mission he was sent to do, and so: "All is accomplished".

With such differences of approach to their chief subject, one might wonder whether the two views of Jesus can be reconciled. Are the evangelists telling us the same story?

They are, and with much the same meaning but their point of viewing is very different.

John's Gospel is sacramental. For John things of this world, bread and water, light and life itself are a way into understanding the things of God. For the fourth evangelist, stale water from a well suggests living water that refreshes so deeply that dank, stale water will never be needed again. Bread that satisfies hunger for a short time can evoke thoughts of heavenly food. Jesus calls himself the light of the world and by raising a four-days-dead man to life shows he is Lord of life. So John can see a battered, scourged and bloodied body and see beyond the appearances to the Lord, the Son of God. It is truth deeper than sight that he describes.

Mark, in contrast, is counselling a community in trauma. His people know persecution and the failure of discipleship through betrayal, apostasy and skin-saving. Mark describes a Jesus of authority no doubt, who is God's agent in the world in a way that no prophet has been before, but one who is like us, knowing fear and dread, feeling pain and anguish, and knowing the depths of despair when there is no one to answer a last cry for help.

Both Mark and John see the same horrible reality, a man tortured and crucified. John tells us its in-depth meaning as he describes Jesus always in control, allowing all this to take place. John is showing that we can have full confidence in Jesus who opens for us the way to the Father. Mark describes what anyone could see who passed Golgotha that day in all its horror. Here is a Jesus who is with us in our suffering; who accompanies us on a terrible journey that Mark's community were having to take. Mark and John take differing approaches but both tell the truth.

At times in intolerable anguish we need to hear Mark and know that Jesus is close to us in our suffering. At times we need to hear John affirm that Jesus is Lord, supreme, one who will carry us through our pain. It is the same Jesus, true man and true God; one with us and for us; by his wounds we are healed.