

*Can I have a word?* How do you feel when taken aside and spoken to by a teacher or tutor, housemaster or housemistress? *You're not in trouble*, they might say, making their approach even more peculiar. That nervous feeling happens to teachers too, when their boss takes them aside for a 'quiet word' in inverted commas; and sometimes line managers are cornered by revolting colleagues. Revolting in the sense of remonstrating and rebuking, of course.

In today's gospel, Peter is revolting. Jesus had openly shared with the disciples something that Peter wouldn't stand for: *the Son of Man was ... to suffer grievously, to be rejected by all the powerful people, and to be put to death ...* Not funny. But here is the funny part of the story: *taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him.* It's makes me smile that Peter says to his Lord and master; *can I have a word?* His anxious demeanour informing Jesus: *you are in trouble!* Peter thinks himself the right man to hand down orders to the Saviour. He's trying in vain to talk some sense into the Son of God. Good sense according to Peter's view of reality, bless him.

On a positive note, Peter felt confident to approach the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords with his concerns. His friend, Jesus – our friend Jesus – is approachable. We can call in for a quiet word with Him any time, any place. Will he still love us? Always. Will he pat us on the back and sing to our tune? Not necessarily, especially if you are blocking the mission of the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Then we will be in trouble and Jesus may even say, as he did to Peter, *get behind me Satan.* I think Peter wanted all the benefits of the kingdom yet wasn't prepared to accept the way of the King. So, he took Jesus aside to share his cares and concerns. A clear message came back. His way of thinking was not God's way of thinking. Jesus makes clear; it's my way or the highway. Rather than taking up his cross, Peter instead tried to take hold of Jesus and control him. We ask ourselves: do I follow after Jesus or do I go my own way? Do we follow the king of kings, or attempt a coup to create a kingdom of our own making?

Peter is deaf to the quiet word Jesus had with him and the other disciples, about his resurrection, and cannot get past the mention of his death. Are we deaf to the good news of Easter? Do I embrace the suffering and grief that life often brings? Mary, Mother of Sorrows, whose feast falls today, had the trust in the resurrection to watch her Son suffer. Peter could not accept this, and when we feel the same, let's ask her for the faith we need to suffer like Jesus, as Isaiah described: *The Lord has opened my ear. For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against*

*insult and spittle*. The psalmist makes a similar point: only when we realise that our self-reliance is make-believe, do we give Jesus the freedom to redeem us: *I was helpless so he saved me*.

Here's a question: what does St Peter have in common with Muhammad? The Islamic prophet is probably the second most influential person ever to exist, after Jesus Christ. Muhammad argued, in the Quran, that Jesus was a true prophet and therefore could not possibly have been disgraced and crucified, because Allah would never have allowed one of his prophets to be publicly shamed. So either Jesus was put to shame and was not God's prophet, or Jesus was a prophet and therefore not publicly shamed. Muhammad himself was a winner and not a loser as a warrior, and he spread his religion by successful preaching but also by successful warfare. Unlike Jesus, he was never arrested, tried, convicted, or crucified. But sometimes success in the eyes of the world is shame in the eyes of God, and shame in the eyes of our fallen world is success and glory in the eyes of God. That is why we decorate our crosses with gold, and why Christ kept his wounds in his risen body: they were badges of honour.

Muhammad and Peter made the same mistake: thinking God would never experience shame and suffering and loss, only glory and joy. Yet Jesus is the greatest, the most glorious winner in human history; because he won the victory not by avoiding the shame and the suffering and the cross and death, but by embracing and transforming it into redemption and glory.

Dear brothers and sisters, I conclude by asking to have a quick word with you. You're not in trouble, far from it. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fulness of redemption. When God touches anything, he changes it into something more like himself. On the cross, he turned death into life: his death into our life. He turned water into wine at Cana, and he turns wine into his blood in the Eucharist, and he will transform our lowly bodies into something yet more glorious in our resurrection. Beyond the cross of life is life eternal, a life that makes the world's worst misery and shame look like a tiny speck of dust compared with the ocean of his glory and joy. Let's get behind Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; let's go after him and his cross. Jesus Christ will raise us up, and make us holy. *We adore you O Christ and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world. Our Lady of Sorrows – pray for us.*