

**A reflection by**  
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## *The Long Road to Resurrection*

At the beginning of the film 'Mandela - the Long Road to Freedom' we see Nelson Mandela standing proudly in a court room in South Africa stating he has a dream of a South Africa in which his fellow Black Africans will live in freedom and dignity. In what is a very moving and poignant moment Mandela shares with those in that packed courtroom this dream. It is, he tells the court,

**a dream for which he hopes to live  
but one for which he is also prepared to die.**

In this moment one can see how one man's dream can inspire a whole nation to believe, to seek change and to move forward with a new vision. His courage in offering his life for his dream also tells us of how much Nelson Mandela is prepared to sacrifice to make that dream a reality. There are for all of us scenes and pictures from the lives of others perhaps greater than ourselves which inspire us on our earthly journey and this was certainly one which inspired me.

Most years during Lent I make a little visit to the National Gallery in London. I know exactly what I want to see and take myself immediately to room 24 to stand before Honthurst's picture of Christ before the High Priest. Christ stands there silent with the High Priest's finger pointing accusingly into his face. His face is the consummate picture of peace and serenity as he awaits an unknown verdict and an uncertain future. I saw another such picture recently in the Sunday Times. A group of Russian Orthodox priests standing in a large public square in Kiev, protesters on one side of them demanding improvements to their poverty stricken lifestyles, and government troops on the other seeking to hold on to the power which gives them authority to enforce the law as they see it. It was a striking image in many ways. It spoke of the breakdown of relationship between the ruler and the ruled; the hunger for justice; the desire to be mediators and to bring about even a tenuous peace. It spoke profoundly of courage and the ability to put oneself in the way of sacrifice, to

***be willing to give up one's life for the good of others***

and it spoke powerfully but with gentleness of peace and the hope of a different way forward.

As we watch the news any images fill our minds. We see bombs being dropped in Aleppo and Damascus and my mind goes back almost twenty years to some lovely October days spent in Syria. I recall the joy of walking down Straight Street and spending time in the House of Ananias. I remember being filled with delight as I sat there and prayed and wondered about St Paul's conversion and hoped that in some small ways being there in that sacred place was enabling my own. I walked the long Souq's or markets in Aleppo – the longest in the Middle East and though of the conversations with the stall holders, the bargaining and the haggling which is all so much part of life in that part of the world. Now as I look into the faces of refugees struggling to find a way out of cities such as Aleppo and Damascus which have become living hells, I feel a huge sadness at the destruction of life and the abuse of power that has led to the death of so many and the ongoing misery of millions of innocent people.

It can be hard I admit not to despair of the state of our world, to find it difficult to wonder if there is any such thing as good leadership. Our modern world presents us daily with many pictures of life and death. Our television screens scream out images of water cannon and live ammunition directed at those who seek for freedom and a better world. Motivated on by bravery or the dream of a better life, young men and woman march against the armies of dictators in the hope of securing a future where the gun is not the first solution to a nations' problems and where there is before our eyes the innocent death and the blood stained hope of freedom of speech and of being.

## *most precious of all gifts — hope*

Searching for fragments of hope in the charred and bombed out wounds of our world is not easy. We can find ourselves asking where it all goes wrong. Does good eventually triumph? And yes the answer is that maybe sometimes it does and maybe it takes a long time, a lot of hard work and the ability not to lose that most precious of all gifts - hope. That is certainly true of the Nelson Mandela's South Africa.

In the meantime it can seem to as if our world leaders are as Jesus was before the High Priest, powerless to do anything, standing in a state of suspense and waiting in hope for a better tomorrow. As many of us will have done I have followed the Syrian peace talks in Geneva with hope and with a real prayer in my heart for the alleviation of the suffering of the people there. It struck me that initially the parties seeking peace could not even meet in the same room. They met separately with the negotiators and only when they had been able to speak to someone they perceived as an impartial other and a certain amount of trust had been established could they meet face to face. Other elements of the process were also striking. Neither party wanted to give in or be seen to lose ground. Territory and holding on to power seemed more important than human life. It may strike you as it does me that the affairs of the world are often mirrored in my own 'little world'. I too can seek to hold on to power; I may find it hard to give in even when I am obviously wrong, and indeed I might ask myself in what small ways do I destroy life by such unwillingness to let go or find new and mutually enriching solutions to the dilemmas which life presents me with each day?

Such power struggles are as old as our world. We might even say they were there also in a Jesus' day. Both the Jews and the Romans needed to hold the balance of power and allowing Jesus to speak about a different Kingdom where peace and justice would reign meant that they would have to forfeit the life they knew and the power which gave them security and esteem. They simply could not do it.

And so maybe we come to the real issue the letting go of or wise use of power. There are not many leaders of the calibre of Nelson Mandela in our world of today. Power is often seen as something to hold on to and not as something which might create a world of equality and service. It would seem that it is Power rather than Empowerment is what makes our world go round. And yet Easter faces us as Christians with another scenario. We see an apparently powerless Christ nailed to the Cross. We watch as his disciples seek to make sense of this turning upside of the values of the world, of replacing power with sacrifice, hatred with love, revenge with reconciliation.

Christ's ability to forgive those who crucified him, his embrace of the thief seeking forgiveness provides us with a very different model of power. This is power for service, for love, for healing. The process would not have been easy for Christ and in his humanity his suffering would have been enormous. Neither is it easy for us, though it begins I believe in small almost imperceptible ways. Shedding little fragments of power over others and seeking to understand what goes on in their hearts often starts as with the Syrian negotiations in one room where the barriers of fear are broken down. However time, and the desire for a better outcome, not just for ourselves but for the other as well, can take us to another room, a room where there is a sharing of a common heart and vision.



Our hope in the Resurrection reminds us that each one of us has the power to paint our own pictures for a new and better world – a world for which Christ was willing to give up his life.

Easter reminds us that we, in our own small ways, as followers of this loving Christ can give up our lives in order to make our world a better place while at the same time being instruments of love, healing and hope for ourselves and others. So let's start small!

Somehow it seems more manageable!

***A blessed and happy Easter***