

29th July 2020

Sadness

"I know not why I am so sad."

Heinrich Heine, Die Lorelei

In *The Merchant of Venice*, these are Antonio's opening words:

*In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born, I am to learn ...*

and later in the scene, sharing his anxieties with his friend, he says:

*I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage where every man must play a part, and mine a sad one.*

There isn't the space here to analyse why Antonio carries such sadness, but it is enough to know that it has made him a different man. He is, as his friend, Gratiano tells him, "marvellously changed".

There can be no doubt that sadness changes us. We resist it with stoicism and, especially for men, with a typical "stiff upper lip", for we fear that it will alter us, not in a "marvellous" or exciting way, but in a fashion that will be at best, unhelpful and, at worst, destructive. And yet, sadness is one of the most profound, and important, of human emotions.

On the Mount of Olives above Jerusalem sits the tiny but beautiful *Dominus Flevit* chapel, on the spot where Scripture tells us "Jesus wept over the city". Fully human, the Son of God gave himself to sadness. With the weight of the world on his shoulders, the pain of it moved him to tears.

Fully human, why would we not, therefore, also give ourselves to sadness? If we do, let's not be afraid to show our emotion, for sadness will touch us as it ought to, and we should show how we are affected. And if we stand with our Lord, concerned for our world, and deeply saddened by all that makes us fearful and downcast, should we not also weep, and, in the presence of the human Jesus, be "marvellously changed"?

A prayer for today

*Lord, weep with us, for we need your presence and understanding in our sadness.
And we in turn will weep with you, with hearts broken by the sins of the world. Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon
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