

Today is passion Sunday – the day when, if we were in church, we would be covering our crosses and statues, and closing the doors of our tryptic icons.

From today we focus on one thing, and one thing only – our Lord's Journey to the cross.

This year, more than any other, our awareness of sacrifice, suffering and grief are at the foremost of our minds.

11 days ago, when the Bishops announced that our churches were to be closed to public worship our Lenten journey change.

As I stood beside the altar in All Saint's Rhiwbina the following morning, and saw the altar cloth that I would not be removing because there would be no celebration of the Eucharist that morning, I'm not ashamed to admit that I cried. The sight of an empty church and an unused altar moved me to tears, in much the same way as Jesus was moved to tears in today's gospel.

For me, Passiontide started early this year. My reflections on Christ's suffering and sacrifice began as I stood in All Saints and tears filled my eyes.

In that moment I knew grief, I experienced bereavement, and I understood deeply just how important communion is to me as a priest, and us as a church.

But let's see where my journey is leading me. Because I went back to the beginning, to the start of Jesus ministry, and the wedding at Cana. You'll now the story. The wine runs out and Mary, the pushy mum, nominates Jesus to do something about it. Six jars, each holding 30 gallons of water are turned in to the finest, sweetest wine anyone has ever tasted.

180 gallons! I don't know how many bottles you've got through on lockdown but I doubt it's that much – it's a ridiculous quantity. Even for a wedding – there's no way they were going to consume 180 gallons. So, what's going on?

Well I think the wine is symbolic – symbolic of God's abundant love and grace. There's loads of it – more than we could possibly imagine or need! Enough for everybody, and it's freely given when we need it.

And all this happens right at the beginning – as if John the Gospel writer wants to frame Jesus ministry, his passion and his crucifixion in the context of this first miracle – God's love is abundant and there's plenty for everyone.

Hold on to that image. Hold on to that message. The master at the feast having witnessed this miracle says to the bridegroom – 'you have kept the best till last.'

Passiontide is difficult. Its emotional and it focusses on our lord's journey to the cross. It is about suffering, sacrifice and grief. But it doesn't end there.

Its not a story about moving from life to death, but about moving through death to eternal life with God, who loves us abundantly, with a ridiculous amount of grace and forgiveness.

Jesus said, 'those who believe in me, even though they die, they will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'

Passion leads to resurrection, darkness to light. So, listen again to the words of the master of the feast and be encouraged by them in your suffering, because we need to say them for ourselves in the days ahead:

'You have saved the best, until last.'

Amen.