

## Stripped and Nailed

IT IS remarkable how restrained the Gospels are about the tenth station: Jesus is Stripped of his Garments. Matthew, Mark and Luke have a passing reference to the fact that they shared out his clothing. St John develops the incident to show how it fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 23: *they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamlessly woven in one piece from neck to hem; so they said to one another, 'Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it'. In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled: 'They shared out my clothing among them, they cast lots for my clothes'.*

*This is exactly what the soldiers did.* (John 19:23-24).

Our attention is caught by the awful humiliation of being stripped naked by the soldiers, a suffering at once physical and psychological. It brings home to us something of the meaning of the early Christian hymn quoted by St Paul when writing to the Philippians: *he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross* (Philippians 2:8).

This Station faces us with our tendency to hide behind our outward appearance, to fear humiliation and to run from any confrontation. It is also a reminder of how often people are humiliated, stripped of their dignity and exposed to the hostile gaze of their tormentors.

When we hear about Christians being

crucified or beheaded by Isis we experience a sense of horror and we are lost for words to describe such barbarity. The first readers of the gospels were all too familiar with the gruesome details of the process of crucifixion. The Gospel writers were more concerned with the religious meaning of the crucifixion than with the physical details; after all they were writing in the light of the Resurrection.

Yet the pierced hands and feet of Jesus draw our attention to the cost of our salvation and to the challenge of being a true disciple. Even if we personally are not persecuted for our faith, we all have to endure the gibes and

ridicule of those hostile to our way of life. An authentic follower of Jesus is invited along the way of the cross, *And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself* (John 12:32).

There is no by-passing these Stations: the way of faith is a way of the cross, a way which can involve humiliation and pain, a way of fragility; but it is also a way of peace and gentleness, a way of holiness and a way to glory.

I love you Jesus my love all things.

I repent with my whole heart  
of having offended you.

Never permit me to separate  
myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, and  
then do with me what you will.



Jesus is nailed to the Cross – a painting by Maud Sumner in St Mary's Cathedral, Cape Town