

Homily Palm Sunday Sunday 28th March, 2010.

A few years ago I saw a film that has been one of the most powerful, graphic, soundly theological, and sexually explicit films I've ever seen. It's actually a Christian pastoral ministry film. It's called 'The Hardcore Life.' The film is really about two things, what it means to be a father, and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Principally it's about the journey, the wonderful and terrible journey of a hero, who is a southern American Baptist pastor.

This man has a daughter whom he loves with a passion. One weekend she goes off with some of her school class on a trip. The pastor and his wife, see the coach off. There are lots of happy smiles and waves. On the Sunday evening, the pastor gets a phone call from the head teacher. It contains every parent's nightmare. His daughter is missing. It may be nothing, she went out on the Saturday night with some friends, somewhere they shouldn't have gone probably, but she's sixteen, so of course she's in adventure mode big style; the police have launched a major search. Days go by, no news. One night after three days of pounding around the house, the pastor announces to his wife that he is going after his daughter. "But where are you going to start", his wife says. "I don't know, I just have to go and look for her." The mother has just lost her daughter, now her husband. She tries to stop him but he's determined.

He goes to the club the youngsters visited, and discovers that his daughter was probably offered something, something small, something safe, something everyone takes, that's what was said to her anyway. It was enough to seal her fate. The pastor is devastated. He is the epitome of upright, clean, pure, disciplined and sound moral living. What did he do wrong? He torments himself with that and a thousand other questions. He then phones his wife and says that he's going away for a while. "But where?" she asks. "I don't know darling. I don't know where, I don't know what this is going to take, what this is going to do to me. I only know that I love our daughter and I'm going to find her."

The journey down begins, and with every clip of the film it gets darker and darker. The pastor gets to know the drug scene. He gets to know its associated links, especially the porn industry. He joins the porn film business, all the while hoping for leads to his daughter. No one has a clue as to who he actually is. He sees some terrible things, things that shock him deeply. He frequently takes terrible risks, daily questions his faith and his sanity. He feels lonelier than ever before in his life. He can't phone his wife or his friends, he feels they wouldn't understand the passion driving him. He has to find and recover his daughter. One day, while pretending to recruit new actors for a film, he views a porn movie that a client has brought along. In the film a girl is repeatedly raped. He says he is interested in this girl. The others make lewd and grotesque remarks about her. "Where can I find her?" he asks. He is given further information and begins another terrible downward journey. It's his daughter in the film. Eventually he finds her, chained up in a cellar, where she is used for sado-masochistic sex. She is almost unrecognisable. He slumps down beside her, puts his arm round her, and tells her he's going to take her home now.

Welcome to Holy Week. This is what Holy Week's about. This is its theme, this journey, this descent, this search; this passion to recover what was lost and must be found. This is what love does, how it is.

St Paul recalls in his letter to the Philippians: Jesus' state was divine. He emptied Himself. He became a slave. He became a poor slave. He became a criminal. He became a condemned criminal. He became utterly unrecognisable as to who He truly was. He became a corpse. Why? For you, for me. This is our God. This is the journey of Christ the Hero. This is who God is, how God is, where God is. To see Jesus is to see the Father, and to see also how the Father sees us.