

## Introduction to the Passion of John, 2015

The last words we hear from Jesus in Mark's Passion, the one you heard on Palm Sunday, were "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Tonight, in John's account, the last words of Jesus are a triumphant cry, "It is accomplished!" Each year the Church presents us with two different stories of the Passion of Jesus, one on Palm Sunday and the other on Good Friday, each with a different point of view, presenting different facets of the same life of Jesus as if they were different facets of the same beautiful diamond.

The events of Holy Week call us to reflect on who we are, as individuals and as a community. Yesterday, we celebrated the Gospel truth that we are the body of Christ. We reflected on our call to ministry as a priestly people and the command to wash each other's feet, that is, to love in deed and truth.

Today we hear Jesus reveal his true identity, even as we see Peter denying his, when he says "I am not one of his disciples". We are invited to look at how each of us is called to be a disciple of Christ, to be, in our own way, Christ for each other and for the world.

The passion according to John is presented as a courtroom drama as riveting as any episode of Law & Order. And, if you listen closely, it is really Pilate and the Chief Priests who are on trial. Jesus is in control from the beginning - even when they come to take him away and he says, "I AM the one you seek"

When Jesus says this, they, at first, fall down. The words translated "I AM he" are a Greek pun with a double meaning that is common in John's Gospel. They are a claim to be one with the God who gave the name "Yahweh" to Moses. In Hebrew, that means something like: "I am who am". This icon cross - often called the San Damiano crucifix - is an image of the Christ described in the passion we are about to hear. It is the one that spoke to Francis, and it evokes the victorious Christ.

As you listen to the Passion tonight, you will hear many references to "the Jews" as the ones who opposed and crucified Jesus. Was the composer of the Gospel of John somewhat Anti-Semitic? Yes, he was, but that was a part of his human attitude, formed because his community was being persecuted by the Jewish community of his time.

Does that mean that this is the teaching of the Holy Spirit calling us to have that same attitude? Certainly not. The Church - on reflecting on this Gospel and its own history - has rejected any hint of anti-Semitism. We cannot imitate the sin of anti-Semitism any more than we can imitate the attitudes of Pilate, Judas, Peter, Caiaphas or the mob who called for the death of Jesus during the events of Good Friday.

Jesus prays for us from his cross, and from his place at the right hand of the Father. After we listen to this Gospel, we will pray the solemn intercessions. They are the prayers of the body of Christ, which reflect the prayers of Jesus himself, who - according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from the letter to the Hebrews, "*offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death.*"

So Jesus though us prays today for the whole church, including the Pope, all of us here and those preparing for baptism. Then we pray with him for the unity of all Christians, that all may be one as he and the Father are one. Then we pray for our brothers & sisters who are Jews like Jesus and his mother, in a prayer that *reverses* centuries of anti-semitism that had crept into the very liturgy of the church.

And then we pray with Jesus for Muslims, Hindus, and others who do not believe in Christ. But the prayer goes even farther, as we pray for atheists like our friend Gary who died in 2011 after living a life of love and care for the poor and the earth itself. Finally, we pray with Jesus for those in public office, including the president & congress & our own town supervisors & mayors & then for our brothers & sisters who are oppressed or suffering.

As we enter into the Passion according to John today, I invite you to join your prayers to those of Jesus. Let yourself be one of those Jesus is praying for as you feel the fear and anxiety of Peter, the despair of Judas, the compulsion to control of Annas and Caiphas, the blood lust & violence of the crowd and the cynicism of Pilate who gives in to the shouts of the mob to save his own skin. Let yourself feel those feelings, so you can repent of giving in to them in yourselves and ask the Lord to heal the attitudes they reveal.

And, as you listen, let yourself experience the new freedom of Barabbas, the grief & hope of the mother of Jesus and Mary of Magdala, the compassion of the beloved disciple, and the courage of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, so we can imitate them and approach closer to the attitude of Jesus himself.

And, even as we gather on this Good Friday, we do so remembering what we will celebrate tomorrow at the Easter Vigil, for there is no Good Friday without Easter Sunday, & no Easter without Good Friday. As Thomas Merton once wrote, "*The risen life is not easy. It is also a dying life. The presences of the Resurrection in our lives mean the presence of the Cross. For we do not rise with Christ unless we first die with him*"

### **The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to John**

John 18:1-19:42