

Homily for the Good Friday, March 21, 2008

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

John 18:1—19:42

This story is rife with elements that offend the sensibilities of 21st century Americans.

So much is so *wrong* in the story of the suffering and death of Jesus.

Jesus was up against a "system" that was corrupt and self-serving: when it suited the needs of the religious or civil authorities both were willing to cooperate for personal or corporate gain.

The court proceedings involving Jesus were ludicrous and about as far from our standards of common law and common sense as one might imagine.

Jesus is hauled in on trumped-up charges on the word of a dime-dropping traitor. False witnesses are seriously entertained. The defendant is invited to incriminate himself. The defendant's only counsel is that of another kingdom. He is judged by a governor who admits ignorance of truth. He is subjected to the brutality of the military police. The sentence is handed down by a mob which has not had the benefit of witnessing the proceedings of the kangaroo court that found Jesus guilty.

A known rebel and murderer is set free and Jesus becomes the victim.

Nothing here is as it should have been. Nothing here is right or fair or just. Everything here is so wrong.

“Jesus, innocent and without sin, gave himself into our hands and was nailed to a cross.”

(First Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation)

Jesus is the victim – the innocent victim:
“the lamb led to the slaughter,” *(first reading)*
the holy, spotless scapegoat
who took upon his shoulders our sins, our failures, our injustices,
our faults, our transgressions, our infidelities.
He deserved what he suffered
no more than we deserve his suffering for our sakes.

Is there an injustice greater than this:

that the guilty one is freed and the innocent man condemned?
that Barabbas is let go and Jesus put to death?
that we be forgiven and Jesus pay the price?

Everything here is so wrong,
and yet it is in this very injustice done to Christ
that we are justified before God.

It was “our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...
he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins;
upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole...
upon him was laid the guilt of us all...
by the stripes on his back, we were healed.” *(second reading)*

If such justification offends our modern sensibilities,
it's possible that we run the risk of dismissing
the suffering and death of Jesus as something foolish;
a waste; a sad, pious dated story.

But only at our own peril
do we not take seriously the gift of God's mercy
mediated in the tragic and redeeming death of Christ.

Apart from the sacrifice of this tremendous lover named Jesus,
what hope has any of us before the judgment seat of God?
Outside the embrace of Christ's arms outstretched on the Cross,
how will we hope to be gathered into and held
in the everlasting arms of God?

If this story in any way offends our sensibilities,
- let us use our indignation to fuel our efforts
to right the injustices in the governments, civil and ecclesial,
of the institutions we belong to;
- let us use our righteous anger to rescue the innocent
victimized by war, power and finance;
- let us use our embarrassment to right the wrongs in our own lives,
in our families, our schools, our communities and our work.

But let us never be offended by the outpouring of love
flowing from the wounds of him
who was never offended by taking on his shoulders
the shame of our sins.

“For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and find grace for timely help.”
(second reading)

“We should glory in the Cross of Christ
for he is our salvation, our life and resurrection;
through him we are saved – and made free!”
(Galatians 6:14)

Fr. Fleming