

Good Friday C + 18 April 2025 + John 18:1-19:42

On Palm Sunday, we reflected on the sad reality that Jesus just wasn't the kind of king that the people of Jerusalem were looking for. They didn't understand that, as we reflected on last night with His washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus reigns through humble service. Today, we see just how humble He was willing to be: to even be put to death by His own.

One of the lines in St. John's Gospel today that never ceases to amaze is where he says: *Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out...* He knew the Cross that was before Him. But He didn't run, He didn't hide. In fact, it seems that He went resolutely to His betrayers, and then proclaimed His true identity: *I AM. I AM*: the very name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush. So powerful is this name, that His betrayers literally *fell to the ground* at its very utterance. And yet they still were undeterred in the desire to put an end to Him.

Another episode that really stands out is when Pilate, realizing the truth that he has an innocent man on his hands, tries to release Jesus. But again, the people will have none of that. And so Pilate cries out to them: *behold your king!* Their ancestors had pleaded with the prophet Samuel to give them a king, even though this was not God's will. And Samuel warned them that a king will only send their sons to war, force their daughters into servitude, and take for himself the best of their harvests and flocks. But again, they were adamant. So God gives them a king, and of course, the Samuel proves true: the vast majority of their kings were utterly evil, and eventually the dynasty completely collapses.

So now, God again gives them a king. This time, a good king: a king who only gives, who never takes. Some hoped that He would finally restore the dynasty of David. But as we said on Sunday, the people of Jerusalem won't hear of it. Their reply? *Take him away, take him away! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar.* That was a lie. The people hated Caesar, their cruel Roman overlord. Pilate certainly knew this, and perhaps this is why he too was adamant in posting Jesus' only crime: that He was the *King of the Jews*.

Well, very quickly, it was over. The peoples' blood lust was satisfied, and they all left, to get on with their Passover sacrifices; unaware, that they had just sacrificed the very Lamb of God, the true and final Passover. All who remained at the foot of the Cross were His Mother, John the Beloved disciple, who gave us his testimony of all these events, and a few women who followed the Lord. So why did these few stay, when all else left?

Well, because they got it. They understood, by the power of faith: this was their king, their Lord, their Savior. Perhaps the 13th century hymn that we all know so well, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, puts it best: *At the Cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last.* She stood here ground. By faith, she would not be moved. As the hymn continues, we add our own desire: *By the Cross with thee to stay; There with thee to weep and pray; Is all I ask of thee to give.* That is why we are here this afternoon.

At the very summit of our church, is the cross. If you drive out from our village on the country roads, you can still see the cross atop our steeple, rising higher than all the trees, offering its blessing to our community, watching over us and calling us back here. Some years ago, I went hiking in the alps of Germany. At the top of one mountain Hitler had built a personal vacation home. But if you keep walking up a little higher up that mountain, someone planted a large cross. So it will ever be, through the centuries, until He comes again. The Cross of Christ, our only hope, will triumph.

Another ancient hymn that the Church has sang to express her faith since the 6th century, which was also our prelude last Sunday, puts it this way this: *ave Crux, spes unica: Hail o Cross, our only hope*. Because we have been made one with Christ, the Cross now comes to all of us. How will we respond? We can either rage in anger and run, like the faithless mob, or remain, standing, with the Blessed Mother, believing that this is not the end. Believing that the Cross is not the sign of the triumph of sin and death, but the triumph of God, the triumph of His love, and the door to eternal life.