

Good Friday-2009

“When Jesus had finished the vinegar, he said, ‘It is Finished’; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:30.

The Divine Salvation Drama

Tonight, we have gather to re-live the events and circumstances that set in motion the death of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. From the standpoint of the Fourth Evangelist, it is not just a passion, it is a glorification. And we are privileged to witness God’s divine drama for the salvation of the world from the garden of Gethsemane to Calvary and beyond. Instead of concentrating on the pain and horror of it like in Mel Gibson’s “Passion,” although we should never take the suffering for granted, John focuses our attention on the exaltation. There is the arrest, the trial before the High Priest, the denial by Peter, the three questions of Jesus by Pilate, the interplay, arrogance and acquiescence of power in the official sentence, the crucifixion, the aftermath and the burial of Jesus of Nazareth in a borrowed tomb.

God Almighty is the author of this Divine Drama. The Jesus of John’s Gospel is the director, producer and main character. He is in charge of the arrest: he knows the betrayer, he identifies himself as the accused and he surrenders willingly. He is in charge of the interrogation. It moves from Pilate’s asking him if he is the king of the Jews to the governor writing an inscription over the cross in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, “*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*” John 19:19. He is in charge of the presentation. The first time he is presented to the crowd, he walks out on his own recognizance wearing a crown of thorns and a royal purple robe. Pilate’s words at that presentation were, “*Behold the Man.*” John 19:5b. He really did not know what he is saying. He is also in charge of the last interrogation and the final presentation. The sentence of life or death does not belong to Pilate. It is in the hands of God. And so as Jesus is presented for the last time, we envision Him as the eternal Lord of Lord and King of kings. In the end, he is in charge of his last breath. “It is finished,” he said as he bows his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30.

The Cast of Characters

In John’s account of the Passion, each sector of the crowd played a part in the inevitable end. We are called tonight to meditate upon those events, to take them serious and to place ourselves in the midst of that crowd. What part might you have played had you been there?

1. The Apostles: Because of weariness, the apostles could not watch with Jesus one hour in the garden of Gethsemane. One betrayed him with a kiss. All ran away and left him. Two followed him into the courtyard of the Caiaphas. One denied him. And at the end, he was left alone to face hatred, torture and death by his enemies. The disciples were guilty of abandonment and a lack of courage.
2. The Friendly Entourage From Galilee, Bethany, Bethphage and elsewhere-Among these

were the family members: Mary, her sister, his cousins and others; Mary Magdalene; perhaps Mary, Martha, and Lazarus from Bethany; Joseph of Arimathea; Nicodemus and many other disciples. This was the first processional that came from the East into Jerusalem-the Divine Procession. They stood helplessly by as the horrible events unfolded.

3. **The Spectator Crowd:** The crowd allowed the enemies of Christ to enlist them in Jesus' condemnation. They had not kept up with current events. Their information came from the sound bites and spin masters. They were caught up into the emotions of the moment. They were so easily enticed to cry, "Crucify him! Crucify Him! His blood be upon us and upon our children." Some served as false witnesses against Jesus. Along with the soldiers, this crowd mocked him. They are guilty of complicity.

4. **The Scribes, Chief Priests and Members of the Sanhedrin:** They assembled an illegal trial before Caiaphas by night to accuse Jesus. They brought false witnesses against him. They maintained that he incited the people, committed blasphemy before God and sedition against Rome. They threatened Pilate's governorship in that region if Pilate didn't kill him. They stirred up the crowd to release a robber and deliver the Christ of God to be crucified. They represented corruptive power.

5. **Herod of Galilee:** Jesus was from Herod's district, but Herod for fear of the hostile crowd and because he was a Hebrew under Roman authority, passed the decision baton back to Pilate. He wanted him dead, but wanted someone else to do it. His guilt is the same as the religious authorities.

6. **Pilate and his entourage from Caesarea Philippi:** His was the second processional that came from the West into Jerusalem-the Empire's Procession. Pilate's responsibility was to maintain the peace and that was a good thing. But peace at any cost is no peace, just pacification. And so, he abdicated his authority over life and death as he deferred to the wishes of the hostile crowd. He sought to wash his hands of the blood of the innocent, but he could not! He was guilty of weak leadership.

7. **The next to the last group was the soldiers-**Jesus had been betrayed by Judas, abandoned by his disciples, tried by an illegal council; accused by false witnesses, convicted by pressure from a clamoring crowd, sentenced to die by a weak governor; and mocked, pummeled and flogged by these same soldiers. They had the last opportunity to say, "No!" They probably said to themselves, "We were just following orders." They too were guilty of complicity.

8. Finally, thanks be to God, there were those who played a positive part. The disciple, John accepted the responsibility in caring for Jesus' mother Mary. Joseph of Arimathea share his unused grave. Nicodemus joined with Joseph to place him in the tomb. And, the women prepared spices to anoint the body of Jesus after the Sabbath. Others would be transformed to witness with power later. But for now, the final act was to be left to God on that first Easter morning. And, God reaction was "God so Loved the World."

The Divine Salvation Drama is now over or should we say has begone! Over two

thousand years later, we have come tonight to meditate on those divine acts, to thank God for his love for us and to amend our lives accordingly. John records, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16. Paul said, *“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”* II Corinthians 5:18. And Jesus said, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* Matthew 11:28-30. Let us tonight, go in peace and go with God!

Let us Pray. O God who on this day gave your Son’s life for us that we might have eternal life: Forgive us our sins and weaknesses; strengthen our wills to follow where you have led the way; give us the courage of our convictions and hasten the coming of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.