

**Good Friday**  
**10/4/2009**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12**

**Psalm 116**

**Hebrew 4:14 – 16, 5:7 - 9**

**John 18:1 – 19:42**

### **Gathered into God**

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The Passion is a complete story, which at the same time artfully contains a series of vignettes, each of which would provide the basis for a homily. Throughout John's narrative Jesus is presented as the King of the Jews who is completely in charge of his destiny while around him civil authorities lose power, and religious authorities behave badly. There is a way in which in the text, two trials are being conducted simultaneously, and in these trials power and religious faith both come off badly.

When Jesus is on trial before Annas and Caiaphas he affirms his consistent testimony, and is abused for it. But the text segues into scenes in the garden where, in effect Peter is on trial. Under questioning he rejects his relationship with Jesus and goes free.

Pilate gets a mention in the Creed because of his effete handling of the charges against Jesus. The action moves between the praetorium, where Pilate talks to Jesus, and outside where the religious leaders are, refusing to enter because it would render them ritually impure and unable to celebrate the Passover. The savage irony is they work hard to protect their right to eat the Passover Lamb of freedom, while politicking for the death of an innocent person, whom we know as the Lamb of God. The religious leaders stuck to their tradition about God, while actually rejecting God.

The same irony is present again when, given the choice, the people chose Barabbas instead of Jesus. Barabbas means "son of the father". The people turned down an innocent man who sought to reconcile and bring peace to Jerusalem. We know him as the "Son of the Father", but the crowd called for Barabbas an insurrectionist and a murderer:

*"They rise and needs will have  
my dear Lord made away,  
a murderer they save;  
the Prince of life they slay."*

There is a further irony when Pilate brings Jesus outside to face the religious leaders and announces "here is your king" and they shout: "We have no king but the Emperor." Within a few hours they will be reciting the Passover liturgy in which God is acknowledged as the only king of Israel.

These vignettes are graphic pictures of the hazards of human sin. They speak of the ways in which we have the capacity to make evil good and the good evil: to name evil as normal, and to ostracize and destroy those who cast light on what is happening and model a different way.

If this is what humans are capable of, no wonder we continue to witness the sort of strife we are exposed to in every news broadcast. If this is what we are like, then we stand in need of deliverance still.

Good Friday proclaims there was a voice and there was a life that showed us another way. When in death Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross, he drew into his prayer of forgiveness, every corrupted and alienated piece of humanity, every impure and broken thing, and took them into God. This is not compassion at a distance this is love that suffers for and with us. And when he cried: "It is finished" it meant the process of healing was complete: his faithfulness to his commission to offer light and truth and life to people, had reached its fulfilment. In this process his suffering revealed what love is. In this process his suffering exposed the human capacity to choose not God. And in this process he offered a new beginning to the world.

This offer made again to today, if we are open to receiving this gift.

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