

Homily – April 18th, 2025 – Good Friday



Today's passion reading is full of contrasts. I suppose if the name Good Friday is to point us ultimately to something *good*, there's going to have to be a lot of contrasts to the lies, violence, betrayal, whipping, cruelty, and

even murder that dominate today's gospel reading. I have to believe that a fundamental goodness must still live in contrast to endless shouts to "Crucify him." I have to believe that truth, as inconvenient as it is at times, is going to stand in contrast to many convenient lies that abound in the world.

With every contrast, in today's Passion reading, there is an invitation for us to seek and find truth, a truth that will ultimately set us free. When Jesus tells Pontius Pilate, ***"Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice"*** Pilate immediately and sarcastically dismisses the invitation with, ***"What is truth?"*** I'm holding the cards, Jesus, and don't forget it. You're so naïve to think that truth has any sway in this world." Perhaps that's another contrast. The truth has set Jesus free and has made Pilate the one who is really on trial.

The contrasts--and the invitations into the world of truth--come early in this story. Recall that at the Last Supper, Jesus already knows Judas had betrayed him into the hands of the enemy for thirty pieces of silver. Instead of scolding

him, kicking him out of the Upper Room, or excommunicating him, Jesus does something we would never imagine doing ourselves—Jesus gave Judas his body and blood. The next line says that Judas ran out into the *night*. Now, this same Judas, shows up with lanterns and torches in the arrest scene in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Who is Jesus in John's Gospel? He is the light of the world. He came to his own, but his own rejected him, preferring darkness. Regardless of this rejection, Jesus remains the light that shines in the world, a light that darkness cannot overpower. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas remains in the dark. He prefers his own lanterns and torches to guide him, even though Jesus, the Light of the World, is standing right next to him. In the world of contrasting lights, what is the invitation for us as Church?

Another contrast with another invitation. Still with the arrest scene, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks twice, ***"Whom are you looking for?"*** Twice the response is, ***"Jesus of Nazareth."*** And twice Jesus says, ***"I am he."*** By answering, "I am he," Jesus is connecting himself with the name of God in the Book of Exodus. In that story, Moses suspects God is speaking to him from the burning bush, but he can't quite figure it out, so asks God his name. God says, "I am. I am being itself, life itself. I am the ever present reality that is coming to you in this very moment. I am the fulfilment of everything you have ever desired in life. I am the unconditional love coming to you right here, right now. I am every breath you breathe." So when Jesus says, "I am he," he is articulating his union with God, his spiritual identity. Maybe that's why it says

Judas and the soldiers stepped back and fell to the ground. They were in the presence of the Divine and the shock dropped them to the earth. Contrast that, if you will, with Peter. Twice, when Peter is asked if he is one of Jesus' disciples, he adamantly proclaims, "***I am not.***" The third denial makes the rooster crow. Jesus is revealing his identity with "I am," and in contrast Peter is hiding his identity with, "I am not." What is the invitation for you and me, if someone was to ask us, "Are you not also one of this man's disciples?"

The Passion story continues. The soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrest Jesus and *bound* him. If Christianity was a crime, would there be enough evidence for us to get arrested and charged? Jesus is arrested and they "bound" him. The irony in this is that Jesus is the only one not bound. He is the only one in the Garden of Gethsemane who is free. So we contrast these soldiers who are so bound, to their own egos, with the one they are arresting, Jesus, the freest person ever to have lived. Jesus freely lays down his life and freely takes it up again. Pondering such freedom, what is the invitation for us?

The contrasts go on and on, but let's look at just one more. Peter follows Jesus from a distance afraid to publicly associate with Jesus for fear he will succumb to the same fate as Jesus...torture and death. Peter warms himself around a charcoal fire. Among the people around the fire are the police, but we are also told slaves are there too. A slave is someone who is not free, someone who is bound, under someone else's thumb. It is around this charcoal fire, the fire of slaves, that Peter tries to find some warmth. Fire gives us light and warmth. The contrast will come later on when the Risen Lord

appears to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter is despondent, firstly because his best friend, Jesus, has been crucified and Peter has guilt in his teeth. And the second reason Peter is downhearted is because he's been up all night fishing and has caught nothing. From the shore, where Jesus has built a charcoal fire, he invites Peter to **"come and have breakfast."** The charcoal fire triggered Peter's sense of smell, and the sense of smell triggered the memory of Peter saying, "I am not one of Jesus' disciples." However, this is a fire of forgiveness, a fire that destroys everything in its path so that new growth can emerge. With this charcoal fire, Jesus has no intention of holding Peter to his sins but invites him to share in his mission once again. The first fire is a fire of denial. The second one is a fire of, "You're forgiven. I love you. Let's move on to building the Kingdom together." What might these two charcoal fires be inviting us to?

In the world of contrast, we will always come up short, especially when we contrast our tawdry, limited and conditional love with God's great love. In a moment of grace, perhaps when we ponder the Cross, we can finally let go of the contrasts and simply fall into the loving arm of God. The late Brenning Manning wrote: ***"Your Father, God, loves you as you are, not as you should be, because you'll never be as you should be. He loves you beyond fidelity and infidelity, beyond worthiness and unworthiness. He loves you in the morning sun and the evening rain. He loves you equally in your state of grace and in your state of disgrace. He loves you without caution, regret, boundary, limit, and breaking point. No matter what happens or what you do....He can't stop loving you!"***

That's why they call this Friday..."Good Friday."

~Fr. Phil