

The Passion According to John

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Choosing the Passion from John's Gospel for the Good Friday liturgy seems a very poor choice. Unlike the movie *The Passion of the Christ* (Icon Productions/Marquis Films, 2003), John's version barely gives the Crucifixion honorable mention. Wouldn't one of the other versions of the Passion be more appropriate for the Good Friday liturgy? No, not really.

Whenever one reflects on the Crucifixion, one runs the risk of becoming confused about how Jesus got on the cross. John's Gospel helps us avoid that confusion by focusing our attention away from the bloody details and toward the cast of characters surrounding the event. It's as if John is saying, "If you focus on the bloody details, you are going to have to ask 'Why?' Once you raise that question, your chances of answering it correctly are not very good. So, turn your gaze over here, and see what truths are revealed by reflecting on the people surrounding the event."

Those people are so much a part of our tradition that just the mention of their names calls to mind some basic truths about human nature. Remembering these truths are important for us in living faithfully.

See what truths come to your mind as you contemplate these characters in the Passion drama:

- Judas (betraying a friend with a kiss)
- Peter in the garden (high on bravado—quick with the sword)
- Peter in Annas' courtyard (low on performance—three denials not just one)
- Annas and Caiaphas (abusing their religious authority)
- Pilate (facing a moral dilemma but acting against that inner voice that points him in the right direction)
- Barabbas (the political insurrectionist versus Jesus the spiritual insurrectionist)
- the crowd (the anonymity in numbers that makes us think we can do things we'd never think of doing on our own)
- the soldiers (who have to make a game out of everything to keep from reflecting on the grisly things they are ordered to do)



- Mother Mary and the Apostle John (“Mother behold your son.” “Son behold your mother.”)
- Nicodemus (seeking the truth but doing it only secretly)
- Joseph of Arimathea (putting another’s need before his own)
- The statements of Jesus focus us even more. “My kingdom does not belong to this world” (Jn 18:36). “For this was I born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37).

The truth about how Jesus got on the cross is not because the Father would only accept a bloody sacrifice as the payment for humankind’s sinfulness. That is problematic theology because it turns the loving Father revealed by Jesus into a masochistic God. A better answer is that Jesus is on the cross not because the Father willed it, but because humans willed it and the Father permitted it to happen. The Father willed that Jesus speak the truth, and to this Jesus was obedient—even to death. Of this we can be sure: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

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