

## **Meditation for Good Friday**

### *“Your Will Be Done on Earth”*

John Dominic Crossan in his new book, *The Greatest Prayer*, argues that although millions of Christians consider the passion or suffering and death of Jesus as the eternal will of God, Crossan believes that we need to ask these important questions: Does the biblical tradition of sacrifice, sin, and atonement involve vicarious atonement? “If you speak of Christ’s sacrifice, or sacrifice for sin, or sacrifice for sin as atonement, does any or all of that entail the theme of *substitution*—of Jesus suffering and dying instead of us and in our place? Is *sacrifice*...about substitution?”

*Sacrifice* means to make sacred from the Latin *sacrum facere*.

Sacrifice, and especially blood sacrifice, is never about substitution, but always about a gift or a meal. How does that understanding of blood sacrifice apply to martyrs in general and, thence to Jesus the Christ in particular.

If you live by demanding justice in an unjust world, there is always the danger of marginalization or discrimination, if not assassination or execution. Martyrs are those who have died for justice or from injustice and have made their lives sacred by such a death. We need sacred justice for martyrs—before, with, and after Jesus—who accept death to retain the integrity of their lives. Such a death is not substitution, but a gift—a supreme gift—to cause or vision, to country, or humanity, to God or the God.”

Jesus died to maintain the integrity of his life. Living Was His Reason for Dying.” Jesus spoke of collaboration, not substitution. When he warned his disciples about his journey to Jerusalem, he did not say that he went instead of his followers.

We have no word for the crucifixion of Christ other than “sacrifice,” a making sacred of both life and death, a gift both to divinity and to humanity. Never a substitution for anything. But still, what about that sacrificial death for *sin* and as *atonement*? How does that fit into Jesus’ death and God’s will?

“God did not “will” the death of Jesus as a vicarious *punishment* for the human sin of escalatory violence. But did God “will” it as a *consequence* for that sin? The execution of Jesus was certainly a consequence of imperial violence and a witness against it on behalf of God. So did or did not God will it?....”

“...There are...consequences of freedom that must be accepted even if never willed. So also with what God “wills.” Every martyr needs a murderer and God’s will allows such events as the positive and negative results of human freedom. God “wills” our human freedom. All else is consequence.”

### *Give Us Our Daily Bread*

When the small Christian communities of Corinth came to share together the Lord’s Supper, a shared meal where all got enough of the same food and drink. It was a real meal, not our symbolic wafer and sip of wine. However, as Paul notes in his first letter to the church in Corinth, that when we come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s Supper. Some go ahead and eat what they brought while others go hungry. Do we show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? (1 Cor. 11: 20-22).

Paul places the meal after receiving the bread as body, and then the cup *after supper*. The sequence of first the bread as Christ’s body, then the supper, and finally, the wine as Christ’s blood, puts the supper in the middle. As Crossan says: “The haves cannot come and have their better supper first, and then celebrate the Eucharistic meal with whatever bread and wine is left over. A full, and very real supper is in the center of the symbolic ritual.”

“From bread and fish in the feeding of the multitudes to bread and wine, from the life of Jesus to the death of Jesus, from before to after the resurrection, it is always about God’s food in the world for God’s people. All of that is packed into the simple challenge of ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’ The Lord’s Supper is already present in the Lord’s Prayer.

Also present is a vision of the Sabbath and how God distributes food as manna/bread for all. Enough food for today also involves no debt for tomorrow.

Rome's ancient Senate House, the Curia Julia, contains two large bas-reliefs from the time of the emperor Trajan from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. One of the images shows Trajan distributing food to the orphaned children of Rome. The other image shows a line of people carrying debt tablets to the emperor to be burned at his feet. With the records gone their debts are gone as well. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus connects food—positively—and debt/sin/ trespasses—negatively.

In Matthew, the sequence is divine forgiveness and then human forgiveness. It is also clear that if we do not forgive others, neither will God forgive us.

Can we forgive as God does?

#### *And Lead Us Not into Temptation*

Crossan proposes that “temptation” in the Lord's Prayer has a very specific meaning. Crossan sees a specific temptation embedded in Israel's confrontation with the Roman Empire. It is about avoiding violence even when undertaken to hallow God's name, to establish God's kingdom, and thereby to fulfill God's will “as in heaven so on earth.”

The last temptation for Jesus is to use violence to establish God's kingdom on earth. And, so also for us. Crossan focuses on a crucial scene during the arrest of Jesus. As we read the various accounts in the four gospels, we notice the defensive sword to protect Jesus and the offensive swords to arrest Jesus. Jesus rejects both swords.

We can name the last temptation of the disciples and particularly of their leader, Peter. It is defensive counter-violence. The disciples must avoid being led into that temptation even for Christ. We can easily imagine and perhaps agree with their protests. If offensive violence is forbidden by Jesus, surely defensive counter-violence must be allowed. Jesus' negation of that exception is shown most clearly in Gethsemane.

Crossan asks--confronted as we are by visions of both a nonviolent and a violent God throughout the Bible, we must ask ourselves: Is Christ the incarnation and revelation of a nonviolent God, or a violent God? Since even Pilate got it right, we Christians are called to believe in a nonviolent God. The nonviolent, incarnational Christ challenges and judges the violent apocalyptic Christ. Crossan says that our Bible tells a most strange story. It is one whose meaning is in the middle, not the end, one whose climax is in the center, not the conclusion. Unfortunately, it seems our Bible has succumbed to the great temptation of the evil one by making God violent, and Jesus the revelation of that violent God. We need only point to the Crusades and the anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust as examples.

As we think of love and violence, so represented by Jesus hanging on the cross, let us listen to Crossan as he explores the connection of flesh and spirit, body and soul. "When body and soul or flesh and spirit are separated, we do not get two persons, we get one corpse. Think, then, of justice as the flesh of love, and love as the spirit of justice. Combined, you have both; separated, you have neither. Justice without love or love without justice is a moral corpse. That is why justice without love becomes brutal and love without justice becomes banal. May the Cross bring to us to see justice as love and love as justice which will break the cycle of violence and give new life in Christ to the world.