

Good Friday 2016
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The Passion reading for Good Friday begins with the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. "Now Judas, who betrayed him also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees" (John 18:2-3a).

This betrayal has captured the thoughts of many over the years. Questions include the motives of Judas- was it really just about the money, or did he think he accelerating the Temple takeover that he was certain Jesus wished to accomplish? Perhaps we've not even been asking the right question. Whatever the answer, scholars and theologians have spilled gallons of ink speculating as to Judas' intent.

Then occurs one of the quizzical aspects of the unfolding drama- Jesus does not resist. He doesn't even try to run. In fact he scolds Peter for turning to the sword, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). One can appreciate Jesus' integrity in keeping his movement a non-violent one, but running away is not violent. In fact it is often seen as a viable alternative to standing ground and using force. Yet, Jesus had let that flight temptation pass as he prayed fervently in the garden prior to the arrest.

One other point that is captured in the Gospel of John- Jesus is in complete control of the scene. "Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'Whom are you looking for?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.'...When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they stepped back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6).

How is it that Jesus is not only able to allow himself to be captured but also assert divine authority (Oxford Annotated Bible p. 176) in the face of arrest, torture, and crucifixion? One possible answer lies in the Book of Genesis with the story of Joseph and his brothers.

That the church would find guidance in this first book of the Bible is not news. The first reading from today is the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The church has long seen parallels in this Genesis story and the story of Jesus' passion. Of course the sacrifice of Isaac should more properly be called the binding, because he, unlike Jesus, was not sacrificed.

But now to Joseph. After Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, they are at first in shock and unable to even speak. "Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor

harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Genesis 45:3-8a).

Jesus, through his prayer life, has come to understand this his role is a combination of patriarchal archetypes. It is he who will be sacrificed and the sacrifice finds its grounding in the incredible assertions of Joseph, “God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5b).

It is only through his own intense and disciplined inner work of prayer that Jesus is able to follow through with a plan that no human would ever propose on his own. It is only from above that he can receive and understand what God could be serving in the cup that is set before him.

One of the remarkable lessons from C.S. Lewis’ book *The Great Divorce* is the difference between those in heaven and those in hell is not the traumas or sins even that various people faced in life- but how they went on thereafter. Heaven is available to all, even the worst offenders, and, strangely enough, even the “good people” of earth are sometimes found in hell. Each category of people have suffered in life. The pain is not what differentiates; it is the response. The people in hell are forever stuck. They are unable to let go of past hurts and therefore stunted in growth. The heavenly bodies had the grace to accept that they could not heal themselves, but that God could if they accepted his love and forgiveness. In time they were then able to look back on those moments of failure and pain and recognize that the dark moments gave way to a deepening dependence upon God and God’s grace in order to grow.

It’s not remarkable that a human, through strong inner prayer work, would be able to reflect upon the events of the past and come to such a mature understanding. It is only in this same line of reasoning that we can call a betrayal a prelude to a salvific event. But Jesus isn’t looking back on his life- he is looking forward for us. *Amen.*